The cult apologist mafia (Part I)

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Luigi Corvaglia

Abridged edition of the 12-part study ‘Fascists, Spies and Gurus. Psychological warfare and the geopolitics of cults' by Luigi Corvaglia

Part II Part III

I - Funny Stuff

In July 2020, my self-esteem flinched. The annual report on religious freedom in the world by the U.S. Commission for International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) closed with recommendations to U.S. President - then Trump - on how to protect this fundamental right; among the recommendations was to obstruct the work of FECRIS, the European Federation of Centers for Research and Information on Sectarianism, at the annual OSCE Meeting in Warsaw. Well, representing FECRIS at the annual OSCE Human Dimension Conference to denounce abuses in totalitarian cults is exactly the humble person who signs this writing.

So began my dossier on the geopolitics of cults (2022). The incipit was with effect. Trump should have taken care of obstructing me (with all the busyness he's had fighting the "deep state"). This grotesque revelation plunged the stunned reader right onto the scene. Like a shrewd director, after surprising him with other equally grotesque revelations, I led him into an orderly historical reconstruction. It was a story about cults, espionage and psychological warfare. Basically, it was the chronicle of a "spy story" That report would be translated into English, French and Dutch and then published in 2023 in the Fogli di Via series by the de Ferrari Foundation.

Figure 1- USCIRF report recommends president obstruct FECRIS work at OSCE

Jeffrey Augustine, an investigator who is among the best known critics of Scientology in the world, has written on the subject:

Corvaglia offers the most accurate description yet read of what is, essentially, a multinational religious-based intelligence operation.

Arnaud Palisson, the analyst who headed French intelligence service's "cults and sects" department for ten years, said:

The dossier on geopolitics of cults is a unique model. [...]

Stephen Kent, professor Emeritus at the University of Alberta, Canada, one of the most renowned academics in the field of cultic studies, called my report '**pure dynamite!**'

I would not have thought that a work that is, after all, a hodgepodge written with a light hand and ironic wit, would be so well received. I therefore believe that the time has come to transform the material, which was deliberately presented in a "filmic" way at the time, into a more straightforward and organic treatment, supplementing it with new information and, above all, placing it better in the ideological and political framework. In this prologue, however, I take the liberty of resuming the spirit of that first dossier so that the reader, unfamiliar with the dynamics of the obscure world I am going to discuss, can be introduced to it with the right attitude, i.e. with the curiosity of the incredulous. In order to attract the attention that everyone has for the incongruous, I report some grotesque things that are useful for this purpose. The first is the fact that my narcissism has been tickled not only by the fact that a US government agency has advised the President to obstruct the little person writing here, but also by the further fact that immediately afterwards a non-governmental organisation called the European Federation for Freedom of Belief (FOB) proposed that Italy be placed on the list of countries at risk in terms of religious freedom because of my presence. You may be surprised at

this by reading the article "Also Europe in the Special Watch List?" (Figures 2 and 3).

Monitored". It seems to us that all the countries where **FECRIS** operates through the "anti-cult" associations federated to it should be monitored, if not even added to the "special watch list". In fact, it should be noted that, as stated in

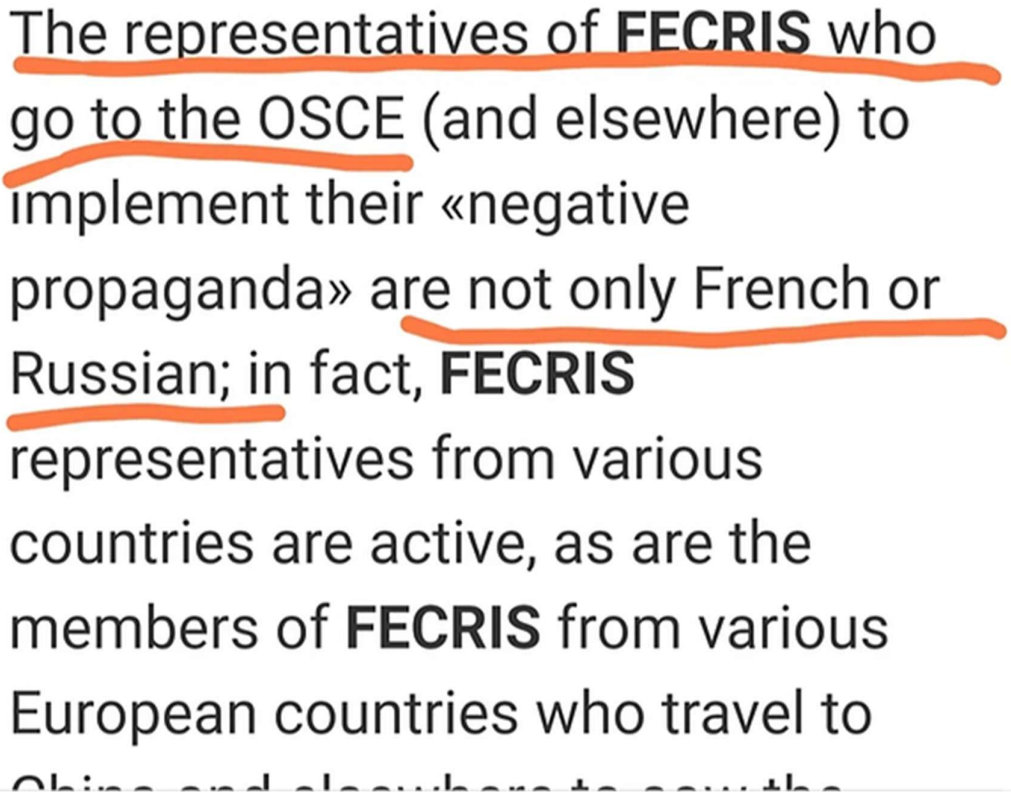
The representatives of **FECRIS** who go to the OSCE (and elsewhere) to implement their «negative propaganda» are not only French or Russian; in fact, **FECRIS** representatives from various countries are active, as are the members of **FECRIS** from various European countries who travel to

Figure 2-3 - Excerpt from FOB article saying that all countries where FECRIS operates should be monitored for risks to religious freedom (fig.2) because no French or Russians are going to the OSCE - that is, an Italian is going... (fig.3)

To make matters worse, the president of this organisation, **Alessandro Amicarelli**, accused me in a public Facebook post of colluding with the Chinese communist regime in the commission of various nefarious acts, including the **forced removal of organs** from dissidents (fig.4). The statement is at least original, so the person who doesn't mind uttering it must also be interesting. Let's get to know him.

Figure 4 - FOB president accuses me in a public Facebook post of being conniving with the Chinese Communist Party by comparing me to Nazi-fascists who deny the Holocaust

Alessandro Amicarelli, Alex to his friends, is a lawyer practicing in London. His correspondence address, as stated on the U.K. Business Register page, 78 York St, London W1H 1DP gives the appearance of being the headquarters of a company with the sympathetic name of "Billy the Duck Ltd" and which deals in video production and lists only one employee).In truth, the same address, a small corner room, is home to a dozen other companies (but no law firm). They will fit in.

On his personal page, Amicarelli describes himself as a "lawyer, lecturer and philanthropist" He therefore loves his neighbour, as the etymology of the word suggests. This is made even clearer by the fact that he describes himself

as the "Founder and President of the **Embassy of Love International**" on the aforementioned page. The fact that the name is reminiscent of an ambiguous nightclub inspired me to find out more.

Figura 5- Google street view of Amicarelli's address in London

The European company search engine North Data creates interesting networks by connecting companies and individuals together based on their business connections. The tab dedicated to Amicarelli contains the pattern of connections shown in Figure 6.

If you click on the link to "Embassy of Love Ltd" you will learn that it has its registered office on none other than Regent Street (Figure 7). Those who know London know that it is a truly exclusive address. However, a simple search for that address reveals an interesting fact. The elegant building is known for harbouring fake addresses for bogus companies, i.e. a virtual address used by thousands of fraudsters (Figure 8). In fact, the address is used by around 4,000 companies, some of which are known to have scammed their investors. However, North Data is an engine that only censuses European companies, while Amicarelli, on his page, claims to have established his embassy of love in the US.

Figure 6- Outline of A. Amicarelli's reports from the North Data site.

Figure 7 - Address of Embassy of Love LTD from the North Data site

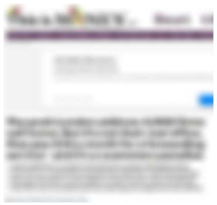

Figure 8- English press article on the "crooks' paradise" on regent Street

In fact, In addition to the company that appears to be registered in Cardiff, Wales, on 16 February 2021, there is another one in the USA that was registered on 6 February 2023 (he likes February) under the name **Embassy of Love International Ministries**, with its registered office in Washington state.

The U.S. address corresponds to the Fidelity Building in Spokane (below in a photo - fig. 10 - taken from Google's Street View where part of it appears blurred at the request of some of the businesses located there).

It is not known what the two sister companies are involved in. Even the UK company register entry does not reveal the purpose of the company, although it does mention duties and remuneration.

Figure 9 - Chamber of Commerce certificate of the Embassy of Love Internationall

Figure 10 - Street view of the address of the Embassy of Love International Ministries in Spokane, Wa, USA

Figure 11 - Obaseki & Co Ltd. The team

If we look at the other nodes directly linked to the lawyer, we see **Roma Nation Embassy**, a company based at, you guessed it..., yes, 207 Regent Street! Activity? Unknown.

We also see that he is connected with **Obaseki & Co Ltd**, the law firm run by Nigerian lawyers where he runs his practise. In the team photo, you can catch a glimpse of Amicarelli peeking out from behind the heads in the front row (Figure 11). You can recognise him because he is the only "Caucasian."

Surprisingly, this studio is actually at the address given in the records, Bentley Road, a far less cool neighbourhood than Regent Street, where he prefers to have his correspondence sent (Figure 12).

Poking around the other nodes in the network reported by North Data, we see a direct connection to the All Faiths Network for the United Kingdom. This is one of the multiple organizations under the umbrella of Scientology.

Figure 12 - The location of the law firm where the FOB chairman works.

This religious holding, whose credo is a mixture of Gnosticism, magic and science fiction (you can read a summary of its doctrine in the third chapter of this report), is an organism with many faces and many manifestations. One of these is the **All Faiths Network**, whose director is **William Martin Weightman**, not coincidentally another direct node of Amicarelli, as North Data reports. It's easy to find out who Weightman is.

He is a proud member of the Church of Scientology and, as he states on his Linkedin page, former director of the church's human rights office (Figure 13).

Figure 13 - Linkedin page of Martin Weightman

This is no surprise. In fact, Amicarelli, Weightman and a certain Rabbi Jeff Berger of the church of Scientology in London, have co-signed a book on Covid 19 published by the All Faiths Network. There is a picture of me on page 25. The photo of the philanthropist speaking at a meeting of the All faiths Network under the effigy of Scientology founder **Ron L. Hubbard** was also not lost on me (Figure 14).

Figure 14 - Amicarelli gives a speech at the All Faiths Network and below a picture of Ron L. Hubbard

The All Faiths Network is one of the members of the **European federation for Freedom of Belief (FOB**), of which Amicarelli is President. Other constituent associations of the federation include **Soteria International**, an expression of the **Atman Yoga** organisation **of Gregorian Bivolaru**, the guru who has been **wanted by Interpol for years** and finally arrested in France in 2023 on charges of criminal conspiracy, human **trafficking** and sexual abuse; then there is **the European Interreligious Forum For Religious Freedom**, whose president is the "Rev." **Eric Roux, President of the United Churches of Scientology in France and vice-president of the European Office of Public Affairs and Human Rights of Church of Scientology** (and probably head of the OSA, the Church's intelligence) and the **European Coordination for Freedom of Conscience (CAP LC)**, whose president is **Thierry Valle**, also a rapresentative of Scientology.

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Figure 15 - Eric Roux e Thierry Valle

One of the founding members, and still a member of the Federation's scientific committee, **is Fabrizio d'Agostini**, who in the **Scientology** magazine "Etica e Verità" expressed his satisfaction at having achieved OT 6 certification, one of the highest levels in the Scientology hierarchy (Figure 16). It almost suggests that FOB has something to do with Scientology.

Figure 16- Scientology magazine's "Ethics and Truth" page dedicated to Fabrizio d'Agostini

Incidentally, Amicarelli is also the surname of the historical spokesman for Scientology in Italy, **Fabio Amicarelli**. Of course, it does not mean anything, it could be a name match, but there is a third Amicarelli, the hypnotist Michele Amicarelli, who also sits on FOB's scientific committee. Three people with the same last name all connected to the same world. It may be, although Amicarelli is not a very common surname in Italy. Below (Figures 16 and 17) you can see a comparison between the prevalence of that surname and mine, which is also not very common except locally.

Figures 17-18 - Comparison of the prevalence of the Amicarelli surname and the Corvaglia surname in Italy: 88 households vs. 803

What is FOB about? As you can read on their website, it promotes and protects religious freedom. FOB is in the register of lobbyists at the European Parliament and the European Commission.

In January 2016, I reported all this to the 'Linkiesta' newspaper, which published an article by Carmine Gazzanni that included an interview with me. The FOB's immediate reaction was a response in the same magazine, threatening to sue the author of the article and me for defamation. I responded on the same page:

I don't think anyone, inside or outside FOB, would have the temerity to say that Scientology, for one, is not at least a "controversial" organisation. Yet the FOB board writes that this statement is "damaging." Why? If being part of even controversial organizations is the right that FOB defends to the hilt, why should the statement that its members are also part of such organizations be injurious! Perhaps an association that defends gay rights would be offended if it were accused of some of its members being homosexuals? A curious logical wrapping up that can only be explained by the FOB board's fear that this might cast doubt on the Federation's true aims.

Of course, no lawsuit followed.

Most of the articles published on the organisation's website are taken from the magazine **Bitter Winter**. This is the magazine of the **Centro Studi sulle Nuove Religioni (CESNUR)** of the well-known **Massimo Introvigne**, whose wife is herself on the scientific committee of FOB). This prolific author is also the

president of a strange company called E-religion SNC, which claims to have only one employee. The company was founded in 2001 (the employee was hired 20 years later).

Figure 19 - Chamber of Commerce certificate of the company E-Religion by Massimo Introvigne and Pierluigi Zoccatelli

Between embassies of love and electronic religion, the various societies that can be linked to the cadre of defenders of "religious freedom" appear increasingly intriguing and mysterious. What will all these entities with registration numbers, mailboxes and emails ever be used for? We will not be told. What is certain is that inferences, rumors and, the more time passes, interesting clues are circulating on the subject....

The latest grotesquerie is the use of a photo taken on 29 September 2017 in Salekhard, Siberia. I am reposting it here (Figure 20):

Figure 20 - Speakers at a conference on destructive cults held in Siberia in 2017

The one on the far right is me. The picture was used as definitive, "smoking gun" evidence of a connection between FECRIS, or at least me, and the Russian regime. Indeed, the second from the left is Alexander Dvorkin, a Russian anti-cult activist close to the Orthodox Church (and the one in the centre is, of

course, an Orthodox bishop). The now iconic image has served its purpose on the main websites of anti-cult movement opponents and has enjoyed an honourable career spanning many years. It even enjoyed the honour of being presented as part of a scholarly dissertation at the international congress of the famous **Centre for the Study of New Religions (CESNUR).** An example of high conceptual elaboration and rare scholarly rigour was the speaker's comment: "I was told that this person - *she was referring to me* - is strongly atheistic - *who told her that?* - but you can see he has no problem hanging around with clergy." Indeed, the bishop at the centre was not exactly incognito. You can see the irrefutable argument in Video 1 (further down in the text).

Video 1 - Rosita Soryté Caught the author of this report in awkward company

The refined scholar who presented this sophisticated argument at the CESNUR international congress is **Rosita Soryté**, the wife of CESNUR director Introvigne and a member of the scientific committee of the FOB federation mentioned above.

The image was even quoted by **Massimo Introvigne** himself in an article in Russian, in which the scholar claims to have seen a picture in which I, a so worldly person, appeared "almost overwhelmed by priests" (the gentleman with the beard next to me is Thomas Gandow, a Lutheran pastor). The director of CESNUR of this blessed image has made it a highlight of his repertoire for years. In the photo below, for example, he illustrates the image at the 2018 American Academy of Religion conference in Denver (Figure 21).

Figure 21 - Introvigne comments on the usual photograph at the American Academy of Religion convention in Denver in 2018

The photo has since also appeared in such unlikely circles as a book on the Covid 19 pandemic published by the **All Faith Network** (but now we know what it is. It is the photo on p. 25 that I alluded to above). The photo later appeared several times in the magazine **Bitter Winter**, published by CESNUR, once even with a funny but sibylline caption that read "Luigi Corvaglia on the far right (which is not his political position)."

However, the most incredible of the reuse of this photo, took place in **The European Times**, an obscure online newspaper which claimed that the anti-cult movement was responsible for the anti-Ukrainian sentiment in Russia and, therefore, morally co-responsible for the ongoing war (!).

The author of this and other articles in that magazine is a certain Jan Leonid Bornestein, of whom there is no trace on the Web. His only available photo, entered into the prompt on the Facecheck.id website, an identity verification tool using facial recognition, returned zero results. It cannot be ruled out that this person does not exist and that the photo is an artificial intelligence achievement.

"The European Times" is a strange publication registered in Spain but whose editor is a Bulgarian, **a certain Petar Gramatikov.** He claims to be a hierodacon of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, although his ordination took place in violation of the canons (he has been married and divorced several times, which makes him ineligible for ordination). In any case, he was ordained by the Metropolitan of Tyrnovo, even though he lives in Plovdiv. So, in all likehood, his diaconate and monasticism are simply decorative. The only things that are certain are that he publishes the newspaper of a wellness center, the *Orpheus Club Wellnes*, in Plovdiv, and that he has a very good

relationship with Scientology, as evidenced by his presence at the 46th anniversary celebration of the founding of the organization's Belgian headquarters. The photo below shows him in the centre during said celebration.

Figure 22 - Attendees at the 46th anniversary celebration of Scientology's Belgian headquarters.

The one on the far right (whether this corresponds to his political faith is not known) is **Ivan Arjona Pelado**, one of the leading representatives of Scientology and a component of church's secret service. Tout se tien.

In October 2024, the French investigative newspaper 'Blast' published a dossier revealing that The European Times is part of an international Media Center called **Brussels Media**, whose executive director, **Lahcen Hammouch**, is very close to Scientology. Incidentally, the contact address of The European Times is that of a satellite association of Scientology in Spain, the **Fundazion para la Mejora de la Vida, la Cultura y la Sociedad**, whose director is that Ivan A. Pelado who can be seen on the far right of the previous photo (fig. 22).

The Blast article also publishes a photo taken in the European Parliament on November 30, 2023 showing an interesting clique that includes Pelado, curiously always last on the right of the picture, the aforementioned Eric Roux, Scientology's highest rapresentative and FOB federation member, in the centre, and Brussels Media director Lahcen Hammouch, second from the left (fig. 23).

Figure 23 - from left to right: Willy Fautré, Lahcen Hammouch, Maxette Pirbakas, Eric Roux, Christine Mirre, an unidentified person, and Ivan Arjona Pelado

Then, there is no doubt about the link between The European Times, Scientology and associations defending "religious freedom," such as FOB and others, like **Human Rights Without Frontiers**, whose director is **Willy Fautré**, first from the left in photo 23, or the ***Coordination des Associations et des Particuliers pour la Liberté de Conscience (CAP LC)***, whose vice-president **Christine Mirre** is third from the left in photo number 23, next to Roux.

At the end of the same month that saw the publication of the 'Blast' article on the network linking Brussels Media, Scientology and NGOs in defence of "religious freedom," my Siberian photo also returned to the limelight after a brief period of eclipse. The reason for this was that the Ukrainian parareligious cult **AllatRa** had not liked my statement to a collective of investigative journalists that their movement was a conspiracy theory with obscure origins and that it exhibited pro-Putin rhetoric. An incredible smear campaign followed in which various AllatRa "trolls" accused me, not them, of being a "Russian agent" or an "agent of the Russian Orthodox Church." That photo helped (see Figure 24). The arguments used against the anti-cult movement, taken evenly from Bitter Winter's publications, also served them well.

Figure 24 - Adept of AllatRa intent on smearing me as Russian agent using Bitter Winter and FOB campaign

Apart from that, there seems to be no doubt about AllatRa's pro-Russian political goals, as several journalistic investigations have also shown. In early November 2024, Ukrainian security services even raided around 20 cult's headquarters , confiscating material that confirmed the findings of investigations into the cult's "subversive activities on behalf of the Russian Federation." Strangely enough, the only expert from outside the organisation who was willing to be interviewed for the TV of that movement about the alleged persecution of AllatRa and other cults was a FOB member, and not just any FOB member, but top Scientologist Fabrizio D'Agostini. I thought I understood that I was the friend of the Russians and that FOB stood for democracy and freedom instead. Evidently there is something wrong with this representation.

Figure 25- Fabrizio D'Agostini (Scientology and FOB) on the pro-Russian cult Allatra TV.

This introduction has thus enabled the reader to familiarise themselves with the actors (CESNUR, Scientology, FOB, USCIRF, etc.), to get an idea of their relationships with each other and their modus operandi, and to learn how the author uses open resources to investigate the network of "cult apologists"." The reader can now immerse themselves in the neat treatment of the history, ideological framework and geopolitical context in which the hybrid warfare operations we have just discussed are embedded.

II - Mind Games

1- The paradigm of the cross-eyed gunslinger

There are two ways to hit the mark. One is to have a good aim and hit the innermost circle of the target. The other is to hit randomly and draw the target around the hole we have made. This second system is more effective, but only if no one is watching us shoot.

A group of sociologists who have monopolised the study of "new religious movements" is a good example of the second kind. These authors, gathered around the **Centro Studi Nuove Religioni (CESNUR)** in Turin, Italy, put forward a single and simple thesis in hundreds of mutually recognised articles in a kind of cross-peer review, namely that is, that mind manipulation is a myth. It follows that the "cults" that abuse their followers are nothing more than a "moral panic" created by a phantom anti-cult movement that is "bereft of scientific credibility". In short, people join destructive cults of their own free will and after a rational assessment and stay there. This portrayal is made with complete indifference to the enormous amount of experimental psychology, neuropsychology and social psychology studies on persuasion and social influence. In fact, it has been clear for decades that individual and collective decisions defy rationality and that the human mind is susceptible to suggestion and systematic errors that can be exploited by those who wish to direct them (Tversky & Kahneman, 1979; Cacioppo & Petty, 1984; Damasio, 1984; Zimbardo, 2002; Budzynska & Weger, 2011).

There is someone who received a Nobel Prize for these studies on the manipulability of the mind: **Daniel Kahneman**. The social influence and power of the perception of oneself as part of a group (self-categorisation) in determining actions is a consolidated legacy of scientific knowledge (Turner, 1987, 1991, Turner & Reynolds, 2012). The existence of persuasion techniques

is the basis of marketing and political propaganda strategies (Cialdini, 2017; Sharot, 2018).

Despite this undeniable mass of data on persuasion compiled by the disciplines truly relevant to such studies, the aforementioned sociologists repeat in chorus that "science" has rejected the theory of "brainwashing".

What science? Theirs, i.e. studies based on data such as proselytism and retention rates in new religious movements.

All psychological and neurobiological studies do not count. This approach is akin to a group of boys refusing to play football and therefore deciding to fence in a new, smaller pitch, thereby defining the rules of a new game, by deciding who can and cannot play, and finally declaring that those who play traditional football are not really playing football. It's like drawing the target around the hole.

2-The argumentative fallacies

At this point it is fair to ask what game those we use to call “cult apologists” are playing in their new playing field. It is quickly said: essentially in the use of argumentative fallacies.

There are three main ones:

1 straw man argument

2 poisoning the well

3 petitio principii

1. The Straw Man argument

The 'straw man argument' is a trick used by those who want to win an argument without addressing its content. It works by attributing to the other side an argument that they have never put forward. Of course, the thesis must not only be false, but also obviously absurd, grotesque or ridiculous and therefore easy to refute. In the case of the apologists, the straw man is 'brainwashing'. Just as all psalms end in glory, all historical reconstructions of the concept of brainwashing made by cult apologists end with a citation of the old film *The **Manchurian Candidate*** starring Frank Sinatra. The film tells of a Korean War veteran who, in response to a certain stimulus, was reprogrammed into an alien-controlled automaton to kill the candidate for President of the United States. This cinematic and grotesque version of manipulation serves to highlight the absurdity of the idea and thus protect gurus, demagogues and cult leaders from accusations of practising it. There is only one problem with this reasoning: nobody believes in the manchurian candidate, no one has ever supported the brainwashing thesis. What scholars mean when they speak of mind manipulation has nothing remotely to do with the Manchurian Candidate hypothesis.

To better understand the difference between undue persuasion and Hollywood, however, it is useful to read a book by the Japanese writer Haruki Murakami. In his book *Underground* (1997), he recounts the sarin gas attack in the Tokyo underground in 1995, in which thirteen people were killed and 6,000 others poisoned. Murakami writes that the followers of the religious cult known as *Aum Shinrikyo* (The Supreme Truth) who carried out the attack "were not passive victims, but actively sought to be controlled". He describes how most Aum members "deposited all their valuable personal wealth of self-esteem" in the "spiritual bank" of cult leader Shoko Asahara. Their goal was to submit to a higher authority, to someone else's representation of reality. Perhaps what constitutes an abusive and totalitarian group is the

premeditated construction of a system that selects and supports this escape from freedom, reinforcing it with slow and gradual steps, playing on guilt and shame. This may not be ‘brainwashing’, but it is certainly manipulation, certainly undue persuasion, because it is aimed at exploitation. We are talking here about mechanisms known to neuroscience, social psychology, the “behavioural economics” of Kahneman - who won a Nobel Prize for revealing the systematic errors (biases) and irrational heuristics of our brains used by marketing and propaganda - and the cognitive linguistics of Lakoff (2004), which emphasises the persuasive nature of language. He clarified how the use of specific terms activates cenceptual frames that guide the listener's perception. To deny this, you have to be very ignorant or very much in bad faith.

A significant mistake in the discussion of the subject has been to define persuasion as a construct made up of a single dimension. If there is only one form of persuasion, it will always be lawful for someone ("we all persuade and are persuaded") while for others it may sometimes be malignant. But they do not know where to draw the line to separate it from lawful persuasion. So it is necessary to introduce an often-ignored dimension: the purpose of the persuader, that is, the dimension of *interest*.

This is a dimension we can outline in an axis that has egoism (interest in ourselves) and altruism (interest in others) at the two poles. The introduction of this new dimension amplifies the range of connotations and expressive typologies of persuasion. These can be reproduced spatially by intersecting two axes according to the tradition of circumplex models used in psychology (fig. 26).

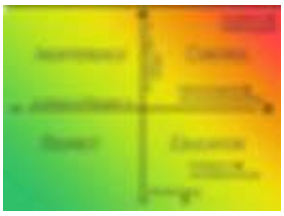

figure 26 - Circumplex Model of Undue Persuasion (Corvaglia, 2019)

Two things can be deduced from this:

1. The first is that the focus must not be on brainwashing through specific methods, but on persuasion for the purpose of exploitation. That is manipulation. The attention must be directed on “why”, non “how”.
2. The second thing that can be easily deduced from the diagram I presented is that the idea that anti-cultists want to censor persuasion *tout-court* is false, as only one of the quadrants represents the mind control area. It is basically another straw man argument.

b) Poisoning the well

The expression “poisoning the well” is used to describe an argument in which what the opponent says is delegitimised in advance by questioning his or her credibility or good faith. In this way, anything they say can be ignored, deemed false or irrelevant by the public. “since you’re bad, what you say is not worthy of consideration”. The constant defamation of activists, academics and associations that show concern for totalitarian groups is certainly not aimed at discussing their arguments, but at casting doubt on their credibility. Indeed, activists who oppose the work of cults are nevertheless labelled as unscientific (because of the brainwashing myth), illiberal (because they are

hostile to 'freedom of worship') or even complicit in despotism. Whatever the 'anti-cult movement' says is therefore unfounded.

figure 27 - Introvigne shows a slide titled "Anti-Cultism and the War in Ukraine" where you can see a nice picture of me

C) Petitio principii (or “begging the question fallacy”)

The most sophisticated technique, which can even be regarded as a genuine mind game, is the “begging the question fallacy” (*petitio principii*). This is an error in which the premises already contain the statement that the conclusion is true. In other words, the conclusion is already taken for granted in the premise.

Massimo Introvigne (1993) gives us a wonderful example of this. He has found the most ingenious way to propose the concept that anti-cultists believe in a non scientific phenomenon with his division into a secular *anti-cult movement* and a religious *counter-cult movement*. He combines the division 'secular-religious' with a division into 'rationalist' and 'post-rationalist' movements.

Rationalists, according to the author, are those who believe that 'cults' attract their followers through fraud, deception. Deception is not supernatural, ergo it is rational. Therefore, there will be both rationalist anti-cult movements and rationalist counter-cult movements.

Introvigne writes:

Anti-cultists will emphasize the secular features of the fraud (e.g. 'bogus'miracles) and the counter-cultists its religious elements (e.g. 'manipulating'the scriptures), but the fraud remains prominent.

Instead, movements that imagine superhuman or supernatural intervention to explain cultsuccess are called post-rationalist. Post-rationalist counter-cult movements theorise the intervention of Satan. The devil is the supernatural explanation favoured by the religious. Referring to the secular critics he calls anti-cult movements, the author writes:

For their secular counterparts of the anti-cult movements, cultists, have themore-than-human power of 'brainwashing their victims; but, as it has beennoted, 'brainwashing' in some anti-cult theories appears as something magical, the modem version of the evil eye.

figure 28 -Schematic representation of Introvigne's double division

An extraordinary *coup de théâtre*! First, we are presented with a dichotomy that is simplified but loaded with meaning. This is then articulated in a further subdivision that produces four boxes: two for the rationalists and two for the post-rationalists, as if there were two floors of a building. One floor is

rationalist and the other post-rationalist. On each floor, one flat is occupied by religious people and one by secularists. Introvigned describes the tenants on the first floor, the rationalists, as very similar because they use explanations of the same kind. They are in the same framework (rationality), but he claims to perform the same operation with the tenants of the second floor, the supposed post-rationalists, who are not similar in any way. Only a very low level of critical vigilance can let this analogy pass. A very low vigilance and an effective frame, that of absurdity ("evil eye", "post-rationalism" and so on). Let us take a look outside the box. Satan's intervention is indeed a supernatural idea, mind manipulation a scientific theory. While it is true that neither hypothesis is universally accepted, the first is not because it is not falsifiable by Popper's definition, while the second is up for debate precisely because it is falsifiable; hence it is a scientific hypothesis. However, a well-designed frame – as George Lakoff teach us - can create an illusion of similarity.

Most importantly, the normal logical processes are reversed in the description presented here. Instead of arriving at the conclusion that the manipulation theory is irrational through a series of successive logical steps, the discourse only spins the argument further by setting this irrationality as a premise! Thus, a tautology is realised that cannot prove anything."Since brainwashing is not rational, cult apologists promote unscientific concept"....

Nice try, Massimo!

It is precisely a "begging the question fallacy", because the same idea is repeated in the premise and the conclusion. Arguments that beg the question can be persuasive and obscure the fact that a debatable claim is being presented as truth.

3 - From argumentative fallacies to smoke and mirrors

The first to take advantage of the systematic errors of the mind and carry out a manipulation are precisely these authors.

a) Cult apologists as cultural parasites

Cult apologists and leaders invoke religious freedom, i.e. the principles of open society that apply outside the cults, the same principles that they deny within the cults. In other words, they claim to defend closed societies on the basis of the principles of open society. I call it "**Salvemini's paradox**" (after an Italian liberal thinker).

Besides being a paradox, this is a form of cultural parasitism, because they take nourishment from the open society to feed closed societies.

b) Cult apologists as identitarians

The activism of the organisations defending 'religious freedom' associated with these authors is presented as a defence of rights, of freedom, of respect for free choice, in short, of democracy. It is anything but.

Where democracy means the universalisation of rights and respect for minorities, the cult apologists' proposal is not really motivated by respect for minorities, but it is very reminiscent of the ***differentialism*** of the identitarian and sovereigntist ideology, **a far-right ideology**, which, on the contrary, values differences precisely in order to oppose the universalisation of rights.

Identitarians and cult apologists appeal to the "**right to be different**". Although this may seem like an affirmation of universalism and ecumenism, the identitarian is an enemy of the open society. dentitarians defend other closed groups against the claims of open society so that it does not interfere with theirs own group.

If the Western citizen is horrified by the practise of infibulation or other female genital mutilations and calls for their abolition, it is because he or she believes that the universalization of rights is a value that precedes respect for a culture that degrades and inflicts violence on women.

The identitarian, on the other hand, believes that the customs and traditions of cultures where individual rights are not respected must be protected because the defence of identity precedes the defence of individual rights. Indenties are superior to human rights.

Cult apologists work in the same way.

The identity of the cult is superior to civil rights that exist outside it. So the call for the defence of rights by cult apologists is a red herring, a smoke screen.

c) The final smoke screen

Finally, it takes a minimal cognitive effort to escape the traps of argumentative fallacies and understand that the New Religious Movements, the term we might ironically consider the "woke" term for cults, obviously have no reason to be defended in the name of vaunted liberal principles, because in the liberal-democratic framework, religious freedom is intangible. Those who need to be defended are abusive and totalitarian cults, i.e. groups where abuse and harassment take place. This defence is necessary for abusive cults

precisely because they operate in a liberal democratic system that condemns abuse and harassment. Anything else is drawing the target around the hole.

figure 29 - Recursive structures: a photo of me showing a photo of Introvige showing a photo of me... (Stuttgart, Germany, 2024)

III - The Cult Apologists Network

Scientology

"The good news is that thanks to the intervention of the CIA, the department of the Greek secret service that deals with new religious movements has been closed and the staff dismissed!!!". So says one of the numerous documents found by Greek police in the mid-1990s when they stormed Scientology's headquarters in Athens and seized a variety of internal material from the cult some of which was made public. Some of the documents contain references to CIA support for Scientology's foreign branches.

Figure 30 - One of the documents found by the police at the Scientology headquarters in Athens in which the Director of Special Affairs (OSA) of Scientology Greece mentions a CIA intervention

Investigators also found thousands of pieces of information about the private lives of citizens and evidence of actual espionage activities. Scientology does indeed have its own highly efficient intelligence structure: the Office for Special Affairs (OSA). The former head of the local FBI office in Los Angeles said that Scientology has 'one of the most effective intelligence services, rivaling even the FBI'.

To better understand what we are talking about, an interlude is necessary to introduce the reader to the Scientology doctrine and its 'ethics'.

a) Scientology doctrine in a nutshell

Scientology was founded by **Ron L. Hubbard** a year and a half after the success of his 1950 book "Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health", which formed its basis. According to Hubbard, the mind is divided into three parts: the analytical mind, the reactive mind and the somatic mind and most physical and mental problems are nothing more than problems caused by traumatic events stored in the **reactive mind** and called **engrams**. It is possible to eliminate engrams, and thus eliminate the reactive mind, in order to reach the state of "**clear",** a state in which the individual is able to realise their full potential. This is possible through a therapy described as auditing in which

the *pre-clear* confronts the engrams of their reactive mind with the help of an auditor. The process is a one-to-one technique in which the auditor asks questions and the *pre-clear* searches their mind and provides answers. These levels of auditing, called "degrees", are fee-based, like all Scientology courses and services.

Figure 31 - John Travolta with a E-meter

The E-meter is an indispensable tool for auditing. This is an artefact that resembles a skin conductivity meter and records what Hubbard calls the "electronic structure of the reactive mind". Fluctuations in the needle of the E-meter indicate the presence of a 'mental mass' that acts as a resistance to the flow of the E-meter's electrical energy, indicating the presence of engrams and the untruthfulness of the adept's confessions, which are obviously blocked by spiritual problems. Once the state of "clearness" is reached, one witnesses the disappearance of a multitude of diseases, an increase in intelligence and a decrease in accidents, 'for engrams predispose to accidents' (p. 122).

All this was already described in Dianetics in 1950. Hubbard further developed his doctrine on this basis and founded the Hubbard Association of Scientologists in 1952, from which Scientology emerged in 1954. Apart from the many 'technologies' for achieving incredible advantages, the doctrine is based on the Gnostic idea of an immortal soul that can free itself from the prison of matter through knowledge. Hubbard calls it thetan. In Scientology,

thetans are believed to be reborn in new bodies from time to time through a process called 'assumption', a concept equivalent to reincarnation.

The expression Body thetan refers to a disembodied thetan that is stuck in, on or next to a human body. All human bodies are said to be infested with these disembodied thetans, or groups of them, known as 'clusters', which are formed in a hierarchy with a leader, a deputy leader and other members of the group. This has its origins in the story of Xenu. This mythical story deserves a description.

According to "Scientology's Advanced Technology", Xenu was the extraterrestrial ruler of a "Galactic Confederacy" who 75 million years ago brought billions of inhabitants of his overcrowded empire to Earth (then known as "Teegeeack") to kill them after rounding them up with the help of psychiatrists under the pretext of a tax audit (that's funny). Psychiatrists play the same role in the Scientology narrative as Jews do in anti-Semitic doctrines. Then he had them loaded into spaceships that resemble the Douglas Company's DC-8 aircraft in every way (that's funny too), had them brought to Earth and stacked around volcanoes, then killed with hydrogen bombs. The official Scientology writings claim that the thetans of these aliens were captured by Xenu's forces using an "electronic tape" and sucked into "vacuum zones" around the world. The hundreds of billions of captured thetans were taken to some kind of cinema (weird, huh?) where they were forced to watch a "super colossal 3D movie" for thirty-six days. This implanted what Hubbard called "various misleading data" (collectively referred to as the **R6 implant**) into the unfortunate thetans' memories, memories that "have to do with God, the devil, space enterprises, etc." These included all world religions; Hubbard attributed Roman Catholicism and the image of the crucifixion in particular to Xenu's influence. The two 'implantation stations' mentioned by Hubbard, i.e. 'cinemas', were allegedly located in Hawaii and Las Palmas in the Canary Islands. These disembodied thetans then infested the bodies of people on

Earth, causing mental damage that can only be repaired by Scientology auditing. For a fee.

These events are known in Scientology as "Incident II", and the traumatic associated memories as "**The Wall of Fire**"or, as mentioned, "**R6** Implant".

The Church of Scientology normally only reveals the story of Xenu to members who have completed a long series of courses (which cost a lot of money). After reaching the 'state of Clear', the individual is supposed to be able to ascend through 8 further spiritual levels, called OT levels (Operating Thetan) , from OT I to OT VIII. Hubbard described Xenu's history in 1967 in Operating Thetan Level III (OT III) and warned that the "R6 implant" was designed to kill anyone who revealed it or "attempted to dislodge it". Despite this, much material about Xenu leaked to the public through court documents and copies of Hubbard's notes circulated over the internet, and it appears that no one died as a result.

A peculiarity of Scientology is therefore the concept of the 'misunderstood word'. Progress on the 'bridge to total freedom' (as Scientology defines itself) can come up against an obstacle if one encounters terms in the study that one does not understand. This, according to Hubbard, would lead to a dangerous process of introversion, abandonment of study and the commission of 'overts', i.e. those 'contrary' acts that prevent the release of true spiritual potential. Scientology has a so-called "Study Technology" to which it devotes a veritable religious/professional course and has invented no less than nine different methods of "clarifying words".

These are essentially the ideas that Scientology followers believe in. What they do has mainly to do with so-called Ethics. To uphold right action, the movement has an 'Ethics Section' to which the follower turns or is sent when sub-optimal situations arise in his personal life or in the group. The Section, headed by an 'Ethics Officer', develops special programmes (often for a fee) to bring their 'ethics' back 'in'. Situations that may involve the Ethics Section are: Homosexuality; family members who are critical of the follower's

membership, but especially criticism of the organisation, its founder, the doctrine by suppressive persons that is, i.e. persons whom Scientology perceives as its enemies, whose "pernicious' actions are intended to suppress the progress of individual Scientologists or the Scientology movement.

The 'attack the attacker' policy was codified by Hubbard in the late mid-1960s in response to government investigations into Scientology. In 1966, Hubbard wrote down the correct procedure for attacking the enemies of Scientology:

(1) Spot who is attacking us.

(2) Start Investigating them promptly for FELONIES or worse using our own professionals, not outside agencies.

(3) Double curve our reply by saying we welcome an investigation of them.

(4) Start feeding lurid, blood, sex, crime actual evidence on the attackers to the press.

Don't ever tamely submit to an investigation of us. Make it rough, rough on attackers all the way.(...) Never wait. Never talk about us - only them. Use their blood, sex, crime to get headlines. Don't use us .

I speak from 15 years of experience in this. There has never yet been an attacker who was not reeking with crime. All we had to do was look for it and murder would come out.

(from *Attacks on Scientology*, "Hubbard Communications Office Policy Letter," 25 February 1966).

The most important management tool for suppressive people is the **Office for Special Affairs (OSA)**, Scientology's secret service.

Opponents of Scientology can 'be "sued, tricked, lied to or destroyed". This is clearly stated in the law of **Fair Game**. The founder of Scientology, L. Ron Hubbard, introduced this policy in the 1950s. Even the possibility of murdering critics is not ruled out. He wrote the following:

The homes, property, places and abodes of persons who have been active in attempting to: suppress Scientology or Scientologists are all beyond any protection of Scientology Ethics, unless absolved by later Ethics or an amnesty [...] [T]his Policy Letter extends to suppressive non-Scientology wives and husbands and parents, or other family members or hostile groups or even close friends.

from L. Ron Hubbard, HCOPL 23 Dec 65, Suppressive Acts – Suppression of Scientology and Scientologists – The Fair Game Law

Hubbard made it clear elsewhere in his writings that this policy is also applied to outside organisations, including governments, guilty of interfering with Scientology activities.

Scientology and the US government

Examples of state intervention in support of Scientology are certainly not limited to the above-mentioned protection provided by the CIA to the Church in Greece. Among the documents published on Wikileaks is a report that after the arrival of US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright in Germany, German Scientologists were invited to a briefing at the US embassy. With the US Secretary of State!

Wikileaks has published cables showing that the American consulate in Hamburg received information about the German task force against Scientology and in particular the well-known church opponent **Ursula Caberta** from **Christoph Ahlhaus**, who later became mayor of the city.

When **Gerry Armstrong**, who is regarded as Scientology's greatest enemy, arrived in Russia, the authorities were informed of his arrival by the American embassy in Moscow so that they could take detention measures against him.

In short, not only does Scientology seem to have more than cordial relations with the US government, but it even seems that the US authorities are doing everything they can to help the church get rid of its enemies.

Greg Mitchell, the founder of The Mitchell Company, is the Commissioner of the Church of Scientology in Washington D.C. and a member of the Church of Scientology himself. According to insiders, his job is to help the Church gain credibility with influential decision-makers. He has been at home in various US governments since the 1990s. According to disclosure reports from the US House of Representatives and Senate, the controversial religious group has paid more than 1 million dollars to Greg Mitchell since 2003 to carry out his lobbying work.

Figure 32 - President George W. Bush with Scientology lobbyist Greg Mitchell at the White House

According to White House visitor logs, Gregory Mitchell participated in a 'Criminal Justice Working Group" with political advisor David Pope in the Eisenhower Executive Office Building of the White House on 28 September 2009.

The Church of Scientology is an informal member of the NGO International Religious Freedom Roundtable, which Mitchell chairs. According to the IRFR's official website, "the IRFR "works to engage the United States government and urge its leaders to make religious freedom a higher priority in foreign policy and national security'. This goal appears to have been absolutely achieved with the passage of the International Religious Freedom Act in 1998.

In 1989, the memoirs of **Miles Copeland**, an ex- CIA officer representing the 'libertarian' far-right (i.e. strong supporters of the free market), current associated with the magazine National Review, were published in London . A curiosity: he is the father of 'Police' drummer Stewert Copeland. In his book 'The Game Player', Copeland tells of a plan hatched by his colleague Bob Mandelstam in the first half of the 1950s. The operation was called 'Occultism in High Places'. The idea was simple: since some heads of state and government were in the habit of consulting astrologers and occultists, American intelligence officers were to 'co-operate' with these occultists in order to turn them into channels of influence for the agency.

The plan worked, for example, when a "clairvoyant" sent by the agents convinced the president of Ghana Kwame Nkrumah to make a visit to China, during which a CIA-inspired coup d'état overthrew the absent leader. According to Copeland, US intelligence also influenced Indonesian President Sukarno 'quite significantly' through 'psychics" and 'fortune tellers".

But the agency also allegedly utilised spiritual movements. This applies to the political-religious movement **Moral Rearmament**, founded by Lutheran pastor Frank Buchanan, which, according to Copeland, offered agents the opportunity to influence not only African and Asian politicians but also European leaders via secret channels. At one point Copeland mentions Scientology. Unsurprisingly, the church founded by **Ron L. Hubbard** was seen as an excellent means of influencing people who were themselves influential. In fact, Scientology's persuasion techniques are well known and are strikingly similar to those of the CIA. Copeland then reports an interesting fact:

We sent into the Scientology cult our agent, who under the direction of Ron Hubbard himself became "clear," but then he demanded and started to receive ever more "monetary compensation for operational expenditures," which together with his savings he gave over to Dianetics.

Dianetics is, as I said, the registered trademark that describes the 'technology' developed by L. Ron Hubbard and the fundamental principles of mind and spirit on which Scientology is based. In other words, it is not clear whether the CIA was trying to infiltrate and influence Scientology or whether the opposite was the case. It probably went both ways. What is certain is that the process known in Scientology as auditing is very similar to the polygraph-based interrogation in the **Kubark Counter-Interrogation Manual**. Kubark is a code name used by the CIA to define itself. It was used at the 'School of the Americas', a US military training facility in Panama, among other places. The students included some of the most bloodthirsty personalities in Central and South America, including Manuel Noriega and Omar Torrijos (Panama), Leopoldo Galtieri and Roberto Eduardo Viola (Argentina), Hugo Banzer Suárez (Bolivia).

Scientology literature is full of code names and acronyms that correspond to the use of intelligence documents, and some of the Church's training routines appear to have been taken directly from the Kubark manual. Scientology's training routine, TR-1, is called "Dear Alice". In this routine, the trainee is asked to read random sentences from Lewis Carroll's book "Alice in Wonderland" without showing any reaction to the book's whimsicality. The Kubark manual describes an interrogation technique called 'Alice in Wonderland'. Hubbard quotes the Kubark manual almost verbatim when he says that

Detention in a controlled environment and perhaps for a lengthy period is frequently essential to a successful counterintelligence interro- gation of a recalcitrant source.

Of course, none of this is proof of an overlap between Scientology and the CIA, but it is certainly evident that L. Ron Hubbard was aware of these techniques and intended to use them for the same purpose that the CIA used them: to gain control and power over others.

In truth, Copeland claims that a pact was also made between the CIA and Scientology, but without providing evidence or revealing the contents. However, we are certain that there was another agreement, in 1993. This is a story that needs to be reconstructed.

Operation Snow White

Relations between Scientology and the American government were not always cordial. In the 1970s, Scientology carried out an infiltration and espionage of American institutions, known as Operation Snow White, which ended with an

FBI raid on the organisation's headquarters. In this operation, Scientology's intelligence service (then the Guardian's Office, now the **Office for Special Affairs - OSA**) illegally gained access to 136 government agencies, foreign embassies and consulates, and private organisations critical of Scientology in order to obtain information and delete compromising documents. This was the largest infiltration in US history. At the same time, a bitter 25-year war began between the Church and the Internal Revenue Service, the famous IRS. We are talking about the government agency that managed to put Al Capone in jail for tax evasion, while it failed to do so for murder and drug trafficking. for 25 years, Scientology claimed tax exemption as a religious corporation. More than 50 lawsuits were filed by the organisation against the IRS. In 1993, the IRS unexpectedly capitulated and granted the exemption.

Four years later, the New York Times revealed some interesting background to the affair. A private investigator told reporters that he and several other colleagues had been hired by Scientology to gather information on IRS officials, particularly about misconduct at work, alcohol and drug use, and extramarital affairs. Irregolarly, the tax exemption came about at the express request of the IRS director, so the normal approval process was skipped.

It was after this agreement, that the US State Department began to lobby internationally to defend Scientology's interests in all countries of the world. For example, when the German government became involved against Scientology (a 1998 report emphasised the destructive aspects of this 'commercial enterprise disguised as a religion' and a 2007 report by the Ministry of the Interior described the organisation as 'incompatible with the Constitution'), a series of firm statements by the US government in defence of the cult followed. For the US, Scientology is a religion and must be protected in the name of 'religious freedom'. Other measures include a document by the **Beareau for Democracy, Human Rights and Labour (BDHRL)**, an agency of the

US State Department, in which Germany is listed alongside countries such as China as one of the countries that violate religious freedom.

The Clinton administration has been very friendly towards Scientology. In November 1996, the President himself wrote an 'exclusive' article on 'what we can do about drugs' for the Scientology magazine 'Freedom', which was later translated into several languages.

His wife Hillary Clinton received members of the Scientology front office '**Hands of Hope**' in the White House and received a quilt with a quote from L. Ron Hubbard as a gift [here] . This event was later aptly labeled in the media as **Clearwatergate** (a cross between Watergate, which engulfed Nixon, and Clearwater, the headquarters of the Church of Scientology).

Figure 33 - Scientology lobbyist Greg Mitchell with the Clintons

In 1997, Clinton's National Security Advisor Sandy Berger met with actor **John Travolta**, a believer in the Church, and other Scientologists to discuss the German government's stance on Scientology (TIME 22September 1997). According to "George" magazine in March 1998, President Clinton met personally with John Travolta. Clinton praised the 'educational' materials of Scientology founder L. Ron Hubbard. According to the 'George' report, he said: 'Your programme sounds great' and added: “I would like to help you with your problem in Germany with Scientology”.

On March 21 1997, the Knight-Ridder/Tribune News Service reported that President Clinton had complied with the requests of Scientologist **Tom Cruise** by instructing his newly confirmed Secretary of State Madeleine Albright to arrange talks with German Foreign Minister Kinkel about

Scientology's claims of religious persecution in Germany (Berliner Morgenpost, 23 November 1998).

In a letter of 'warm greetings' dated December 22 1999, Clinton thanked Scientologists for 'all your efforts to promote and build just communities united in understanding, compassion and mutual respect".

The official reason given for the Clintons' interest in Scientology was that the President had a Scientology sympathiser as a roommate when he was a studen t.

The US government's interference in Scientology outside US territory has been even more serious. At the end of 1998, for example, the US State Department sponsored a concert by jazz pianist and Scientology loyalist Chick Corea in Berlin because he was allegedly not allowed to perform in Germany due to 'religious discrimination'.

Just how far the US government's administrative support of cults can go is shown by the advice of the US State Department spokesman, who recommended that Germans watch the film 'Mission Impossible' starring Tom Cruise. The Hollywood star is Scientology's ambassador in Europe. In a letter to the State Department, he spoke seriously and openly about his lobbying work for Scientology:

... I appreciate the valuable assistance the State Department has given to members of my Church in protecting their rights, especially in Europe.

It is even known an intervention by the US Consulate General in Hamburg about the building permit issued by the city's technical authority for the establishment of the new Scientology Centre in the city, which concerned, among other things, the number of toilets and showers.

Many influential politicians in the United States have been recruited by Scientology. Some of them can be shown to be dependent on Scientology campaign contributions. An outdated list can be found on the Internet.

The agreement between the government and Scientology was accompanied by a secret protocol that has not yet been made public. What could be the content? Surely we can guess the potential of a planetary organisation like Scientology, whose main objectives include collecting and storing a large amount of information so that it can blackmail and compromise anyone, from the ordinary member who has gone astray to the powerful of Earth. To name one example: Arseny Yatsenyuk, the Prime Minister of Ukraine, who probably attended several courses in Scientology many years ago as director of the Aval Bank of Kiev, is an example of a man whose personal information would be extremely interesting not only to Scientology but also to the American intelligence services.

Certainly, the weight of the Church founded by L. Ron Hubbard seems to have grown disproportionately in the political sphere since the mid-1990s, when a powerful lobbying effort was initiated that has been meticulously described by **Stephen A. Kent** of the University of Alberta. **The church funded politics** and its celebrities (Tom Cruise, John Travolta and others) personally financed election campaigns. According to Bruno Foucherau, Scientology paid $725,000 to a political lobbying firm in 1997 and $420,000 the following year. Greg Jensen, one of the church's most respected leaders, allegedly sponsored the campaign of Senator Benjamin A. Gillman, who **would later become chairman**

of the OSCE's Commission on Religious Freedom, an organisation that nearly led to a diplomatic incident over its attacks on France's anti-cult policies at the OSCE meeting (in the section moderated by Introvigne, director of **CESNUR**).

Emblematic of Scientology's closeness to the US government is the affair surrounding the dismissal of **Arnaud Palisson**, who headed the "Sects and Cults" department of the French secret service for ten years when Sarkozy was in government, who received Tom Cruise at the Elysée Palace and was very accommodating towards the Church. Asked about the affair, Palisson, who now lives in Canada, replied: "Sarkozy is the American. He does not want to do anything that displeases him'. Operation Snow White is now just a memory.

Scientology and the network of 'cult apologists'

The Hadden Memorandum

When you encounter organizations with Religious Freedom or Religious Liberty in their names, you know that you have run into another **Scientology** front.

Benjamin Beit-Hallami, professor emeritus at the University of Haifa, says this in his recently published book Academic Advocacy for New Religious Movements: Of Apocalypse and Justice (2025). The story that unfolds since the 1980s onwards, both in the field of studies on the so-called New Religious Movements (NRM) and in that of associations that protect religious freedom, is the demonstration of what Beit-Hallahmi claims. His book highlights the **Hadden Memorandum**. This is a confidential email from **Jeffrey Hadden**, a professor at the University of Virginia, which became public against the

author's wishes. The subject was: *Developments following the informal meeting in Salt Lake City on 27 October 1989.* The text states that Hadden and two other well-known NRM scholars, **Eileen Barker** and **David Bromley,** met in New York from 10 to 12 December 1989 to discuss in greater depth what had previously been discussed. In these meetings they discussed with Perry London (dean of the Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology at Rutgers University); Mark Galanter (professor of psychiatry and director of the Division of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse at NYU School of Medicine); Eric Lieberman (attorney involved in several cases involving NRMs); Dean Kelley (National Council of Churches) and John Biermans, David Hagar and Hugh Spurgen [the last three represented the controversial Reverend Moon's Unification Church].

Lieberman is described as a "lawyer who has been involved in several NRM cases," and later in the memo he is referred to as "our legal counsel." In reality, Lieberman has never been involved in an NRM case. His notoriety — or infamy - stems from the fact that he worked for Scientology. If he was "their" legal counsel, did he work for free or was he paid by Scientology?

The memo then reveals a network of meetings and strategies between known New Religious Movement (NRM) scholars, lawyers, and NRM representatives aimed at "neutralizing" – this is the term used –cult critics (anti-cults), such as **Margaret Singer** and the American Family Foundation (AFF). The memo's three main proposals were:

1. **Creation of a secret funding stream from the NRM** to an "independent" group made up of the organisers of the meetings to support research in favour of the cults, with the origin and purpose of the funds not being made transparent. It was discussed, for example, during the meetings with the Unification Church, but it seems that the latter limited itself at

the time to funding the **American Conference on Religious Freedom**, a conference organised by **Americans for the Preservation of Religious Liberty (APRL)**, a front organisation of Scientology.

2. **Creation of an American version of INFORM (UK)**. The Information Network Focus on Religious Movements (INFORM) is a seemingly reputable organisation founded by **Eileen Barker** in London in 1988. In the letter, Hadden writes that Barker "has taken a very significant step towards neutralising the anti-cult movements in the UK". Hadden reveals here that this organisation, which also enjoys some academic prestige, was in fact part of **a worldwide campaign against anti-cultists**, at least at the time of the letter, and the author is promoting the establishment of a version in the US with the same aims.

3. **Developing a strategy to counter the American Family Foundation's (AFF) "Project Recovery" program,** which helps former cult members and their families, through a public campaign and the production of a new academic research agenda aimed at delegitimizing the concept of brainwashing.

Hadden's text thus reveals **an active, covert, and ideologically orientated collaboration** between certain scholars and the religious movements under scrutiny. Hadden and others (including Melton, Barker, Bromley, Lewis and Richardson) not only studied the NRM, but also defended it to critics and the media. On October 15, 1998, nearly a decade after the memo was written, Hadden wrote on the NUREL-L mailing list, "This was a private communication to about 12–15 people who had met privately at a professional conference to consider what, if anything, social scientists could or should do to 'neutralize' the activities of various anti-cultists."

The term "**neutralize**," used in 1989 and repeated in 1998, speaks for itself. Hadden admits that **the intention was not to investigate, but to actively intervene in the object of study**. One would expect scholars to analyse anti-cultists and not attempt to **sabotage their activities**. This points to an ethical development in which the protection of cults takes precedence over scientific impartiality and the confrontation with scholars involved in "cultic studies" is not limited to a scientific dispute but to the delegitimisation of the opponent.

In 1992, the **Association for World Academics for Religious Education (AWARE)** came on the scene under the leadership of **James R. Lewis** , which describes itself (see Lewis's Wikipedia page) as "... an information center established to disseminate objective information about non-traditional religions [...] AWARE also educates the academic community and the general public about the severe persecution suffered by religious and cultural minorities [...] and supports the United States government in its efforts to reduce prejudice in our country and around the world" (Lewis, 1994, p. 214). This public program goes far beyond academic research.

Although INFORM USA was never launched, the actions and projects developed in this memorandum have been reflected in a dense network that brings together organisations dedicated to lobbying for religious freedom and study centres such as **CESNUR**, on whose international scientific committee Eileen Barker herself serves.

In his book, Beit-Hallahmi then writes about a seemingly trivial fact:

I have before me an undated fax message from James R. Lewis, in which he wrote:

I once witnessed Jeff Hadden asking an ISKCON representative to give $ to the SSSR [Society for the Scientific Study of Religion]. He further suggested that the money be 'laundered' by being passed first through a third organization. This was many years ago when Jeff was president of the SSSR." Hadden was SSSR president in 1984.

This is not an unimportant point. The creation of "Chinese boxes" consisting of fictitious companies and organisations still seems to be in vogue today to hide the trail of dirty money by some cult apologists. Like Beit-Hallahmi, I too jealously guard some papers. These are evidence and signed testimonies of money transfers from controversial groups to a company in the American West, run by a disbarred lawyer in three states, from which the money then goes to religious freedom organisations and more or less reputable academics. My secrecy in this matter acts as a life insurance policy: this evidence would be made public if something were to happen to me (but also if the intimidation I am constantly subjected to - fair game? - were too much to bear).

The network at work

The **Cult Awareness Network (CAN)** was the most important organisation to emerge from the anti-cult movement in America. In 1991, Time magazine quoted the then director of CAN, Cynthia Kisser, in the article 'The Thriving Cult of Greed and Power'. Kisser stated that: " Scientology is quite likely the most ruthless, the most classically terroristic, the most litigious and the most lucrative cult the country has ever seen. No cult extracts more money from its members". These comments and other forms of criticism from CAN caught the attention of the Church of Scientology and 'Landmark Education', which separately took legal action against the organisation. in 1996, Scientology sued "deprogrammer" **Rick Ross** and CAN for violating the civil rights of Jason

Scott, a member of a Pentecostal church who was abducted by Ross and two other associates to undergo "deprogramming" at the behest of his parents.

CAN was involved because a contact person in the organisation had referred Scott's mother to Rick Ross. In the trial, Jason Scott was represented by Kendrick Moxon, a prominent Scientologist lawyer. Ross and CAN lost the case, which drove CAN into bankruptcy.

The puzzling thing is that the association's phone numbers, name, logo and real estate were acquired by Mr Hayes - a member of the Church of Scientology - who gave them away for free to a Californian group whose board includes several Scientology members (see here). In other words: Scientology has formed an anti-cult organisation on its own! Basically, it's like the Mafia founding an anti-Mafia organisation. The new CAN is, as one might suspect, much softer on alternative groups. The new CAN's list of experts includes **Gordon Melton** and **Massimo Introvigne**. The latter is the director and founder of the **Centro Studi Nuove Religioni (CESNUR)**, the former is the director of the American section of the same **CESNUR**.

CESNUR's benevolence towards Scientology has led some to speculate that the two organisations have a mercenary relationship. The director of CESNUR, who sent me a cease and desist notice on the matter, says this is not true. To be honest, I don't believe it either. It would be wrong to reduce CESNUR's activities to a mean form of intellectual prostitution. The study centre and Scientology seem to have the same goals and pursue them through cultural influence. It is not about buying a service.

Right in the middle of the 1990s, when anti-cult campaigns were being activated in Europe and religious freedom control institutes were proliferating in the US, Scientology seemed to become the rallying point for many other minority cults, forming more or less formal and more or less open alliances supported by America's Christian fundamentalist organisations and, by

osmosis, by their political credentials. Organisations like the Institute on Religion and Public Policy are an interesting hodgepodge of diverse people, from ultra-conservative senators to Moonies (the followers of Reverend Moon's **Unification Church**) and the followers of Guru Sri Chimmoy. However, this does not prevent the Institute from describing itself as '**fundamentalist Catholic**'. The founder and president was **Joseph K. Griebosky**. In 2004, a former employee of Griebosky's, Daniel Chapman, contacted the well-known activist **Gerry Armostrong** to inform him that Griebosky received $8,000 per month from Scientology when he founded the IRPP in 1999. It is possible that Scientology itself paid for the founding of the IRPP. In December 2011, Mark ("Marty") Rathbun, a former high-ranking Scientologist, published on his blog a Scientology document titled "Grieboski Programme" dated 29 January 2007, which described "goals" or actions that church leaders believed Grieboski had to take to solve Scientology's problems in Europe and facilitate its entry into Muslim countries.

The Institute on Religion and Public Policy opens up the phenomenon of incongruent aggregations and paradoxical ecumenism. This will become particularly evident in the coming years with the explosion of associations and federations whose declared aim is to lobby national and supranational political bodies to oppose the actions of organisations protecting the victims of cults. The action is best known in Europe, a continent where the anti-cult policies of some countries, notably France, but also Germany, which has imposed significant restrictions on Scientology, pose a threat to those who consider it useful to defend 'religious freedom". The most important organisations of the so-called 'cult apologists' are the Belgian **Human Rights WIthout Frontiers (HRWF)**, the French **Coordination des associations et des particuliers pour la liberté de conscience (CAP LC)** and the Italian European Federation for Freedom of Belief (FOB). Then, of course, there is the **Centro Studi Nuove Religioni (CESNUR)**, a scientific think tank that supports the

demands of the above-mentioned associations with the supposed authority of academic knowledge. Let us briefly examine them.

The president of the HRWF is Willy Fautrè, a regular visitor to the US embassy in Brussels and a long-time correspondent for **News Network International**, an evangelical US publishing group that is fiercely anti-communist (communism meaning anything that deviates from right wing views) and extremely conservative (against abortion, against recognising same-sex couples, etc.). He was also a member of the International **Helsinki Federation for Human Rights (IHF)**, an organisation that apparently had links with **Scientology**. Indeed, the Greek correspondent of the Federation contributed to publications of the church founded by Ron Hubbard and the Moscow delegation published a book in collaboration with Scientology.

It is interesting to note, with regard to **Human Rights Without Frontiers (HRWF)**, that its claim of independence from religious, political, or philosophical movements is seriously undermined by its financial records. In 2019, in fact, about half of the organization's total income came from a single source: the **Alfred Vogel Foundation**, as clearly stated in the 2019 financial report (archive).

The **Alfred-Vogel-Stiftung**, registered in Switzerland under number CHE-102.058.838, was established to continue and disseminate the naturopathic philosophy of its founder and to allocate surpluses to institutions reflecting his "Christian philosophy." In reality, this wording points to Alfred Vogel's well-known affiliation with the **Jehovah's Witnesses**: the first edition of his manual *Der kleine Doktor* contained warnings against blood transfusions, consistent with the movement's doctrine, and the company **A. Vogel AG** was co-founded with **M. Bolle**, himself a Jehovah's Witness, together with other executives linked to the same community.

Seen in this context, it is hardly surprising that HRWF has repeatedly published articles and reports openly favorable to the Jehovah's Witnesses—for instance, here, here, here, and here.

The French **CAP LC** has **Thierry Valle** as its president, who is pictured in the photos below (Fig. 34) together with Françoise Morel, a leading Scientology figure, in front of the headquarters of the **Citizens' Commission for Human Rights (CCHR)**, a front office of the Church of Scientology. The photos were taken by a group of French 'ethical hackers' who were active against Scientology in 2015.

Figure 34 - Thierry Valle in front of the CCHR (Scientology) in 2015

Thierry Valle also appears in the **list of employees of the Guaranty Building (HGB) in Los Angeles**, one of Scientology's most important administrative locations, for the year 1994, which the former Scientologist Paul Adams compiled a few years later.

The Italian European Federation for Freedom of Belief (FOB) describes itself on its website as 'an interest-led non-governmental organisation registered in the official register of lobbies at the EU Parliament and the Commission in Brussels and Strasbourg, representing six nations'. The current president is Alessandro Amicarelli, who accused me of collaborating with the Chinese Communist Party on organ harvesting (see the prologue to this dossier). Incidentally, one of the founding members was **Fabrizio d'Agostini**, who is still a member of the scientific committee. His form of presentation is missing a basic piece of information that is, however, easy to find in Scientology publications: he is a high-ranking Scientologist. He would even be OT VIII.

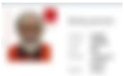

Figure 35 - Interpol file on the wanted man Gregorian Bivolaru

One of the founding organisations is **Soteria International**, an emanation of **Atman Yoga** (formerly MYSA Yoga) by **Gregorian Bivolaru**, the 'sex guru' who is currently in prison in France after being on the run for many years. He is facing charges of sexual abuse, human trafficking and more. **Rosita Šorytė**, the **wife of CESNUR director Massimo Introvigne**, sits on the FOB's scientific committee.

These organisations work through coordinated lobbying of supranational bodies (UN, OSCE, Council of Europe, ECHR), just as envisaged in the **manifesto** written by Introvigne in response to the French law against cults. We will come back to this.

In 2019, the Scientology front group **Fundación para la Mejora de la Vida, la Cultura y la Sociedad** was granted Special Consultative Status by the United Nations. The foundation is headed by **Ivan Arjona Pelado** , a high-ranking member of the Church's secret service, the **Office for Special Affairs (OSA)**. This status will enhance Scientology's ability to speak to the United Nations and will also enable it to organise conferences under the UN umbrella and thus gain new political allies from around the world.

The previous year, Ivan Pelado, Greg Mitchell and Eric Roux, a top Scientology figure in Europe and head of the OSA, took part in a summit on religious freedom in Brussels organised by ACRE, the Alliance of Conservatives and Reformists in Europe. This is a Eurosceptic political group in the European Parliament. The most renowned participants were **Ahmed Shaheed**, Special Rapporteur on Human Rights at the UN Human Rights Council, and **Sam**

Brownback, former Governor of Kansas and, until Biden's election, US Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom. Brownback's office published the **State Department's annual report on international religious freedom**. Brownback's selection as Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom in 2018 was made by **USCIRF**. USCIRF is the **United States Commission on International Religious Freedom**, the commission that advised the US President in 2020 to obstruct the work of the anti-cult federation FECRIS at the OSCE (see the prologue to this report).

Figure 36 - Scientology's official lobbyist Greg Mitchell with Alessandro Amicarelli, FOB President

Other speakers included the aforementioned **Willy Fautrè**, President of **Human Rights Without Frontiers (HRWF)**, and **Patricia Duval**, a French lawyer who is rarely absent from Scientology panels. She is a member of the scientific committee of the Italian **European Federation for Freedom of Belief (FOB)** and is one of the authors of the CESNUR magazine on religious freedom **Bitter Winter** and the **Journal of CESNUR**.

Also present was **Bashy Quraishy** from EMISCO, an association that fights against anti-Islamic prejudice but, strangely enough, fights against the anti-cult movement.

This is just one example of the diverse lobbying activities of the network of "cult apologists" at the level of transnational politics.

The actions of Scientology organisations and the cult apologists at European level are facilitated by the benevolence of various French-speaking personalities. For example, the French far-right MEP **Maxette Pirbakas** (2019-2024) and the Moroccan businessman **Lahcen Hammouch**, CEO of **Brussels Media**, the holding company that publishes **the European Times**. The former is

the organiser of the conference on religious freedom, whose speakers are pictured in Figure 23 (see below), with the MEP third from the left. **Lahcen Hammouch** (second from left in the picture) is an entrepreneur who is committed to the cause of the Moroccan Sahara. He is running for mayor of Brussels for the 'Les Engages' party, which, [according to the newspaper 'Blast', emerged from an ufological cult].

Figure 23 bis -Fautré, Hammouch, Pirbakas, Roux, Mirre, unknown, Arjona Pelado

Two photos taken at the OSCE Human Rights Meeting in Warsaw in different years give an idea of how coordinated this action is. The first (fig. 37) shows in the front row, from the left, the **Scientology** delegate **Ivan Arjona Pelado**, next to him **Massimo Introvigne**, the director of **CESNUR** and **Bitter Winter**, then **Willy Fautrè** from **Human Rights Without Frontiers** and finally **Alessandro Amicarelli** from the **European Federation for Freedom of Belief (FOB)**. In the second row, behind the Scientology representative, **Christine Mirre**, Vice-President of the **Coordination des Associations et des Particuliers pour la Liberté de Conscience (CAP LC)**. The first thing the viewer notices is that, apart from the Scientology representative who had not noticed, everyone is smiling at the same camera, even the CAP LC representative in the second row. Like a school group on a field trip, they are one group.

This photo is proudly displayed on the banner of the website of the European Federation for Religious Freedom (FOB). It shows, among other things, the arrival of **Bashy Quraishy**, the man with the black beret on his head and a colourful scarf, who is just taking his place. Practically all the members of the Brussels Committee for Religious Freedom mentioned a few lines above.

Figure 37 - Ivan Arjona Pelado (Scientology), Massimo Introvigne (CESNUR), Willy Fautrè (HRWF), Alessandsro Amicarelli (FOB) and, in the second row, Christine Mirre (Cap LC) at the OSCE meeting in Warsaw

The second photo (Fig. 38) is even more telling and shows a briefing with high-ranking representatives of Scientology meeting with representatives of organisations defending "religious freedom". So we are not talking here about a simple 'conflict of interest', but about blatant complicity. It is evident that this is a coordinated and planned action by some Scientology executives (including those of the OSA) and the leaders of the NGOs in defence of religious freedom. The photo was taken at the OSCE meeting in Warsaw shortly before the start of the session in which I would have attended.

Figure 38 - Thierry Valle (CAP LC), Christine Mirre (CAP LC), Ivan Arjona Pelado (Scientology), Willy Fautré (HRWF) and Eric Roux (Scientology) give a briefing together before the session on religious freedom at the OSCE meeting

The cult apologist mafia (Part II)

- Dec 24, 2024
- 57 min read

Luigi Corvaglia

Abridged edition of the 12-part study ‘Fascists, Spies and Gurus. Psychological warfare and the geopolitics of cults' by Luigi Corvaglia

Part I Part III

IV - The Black Network

A strange religious expert

Figure 39- Yves Guérin-Sérac

The 'Foro Espiritual' in Estella, Spain, is, as it says on the city's website, 'a workshop of fraternity where different religious communities coexist in an atmosphere of harmony, peace and joy, seeking meeting points with the aim of the world finding peace'. In short, an ecumenical festival with clear New Age connotations. At the first edition in 2006, the speakers included a certain Ives Guillou, who was presented as an 'expert on religions'. Anyone who knows enough about the 'strategy of tension" and the italian 'anni di piombo' (years of lead) will wince when they read this name. It is the real name of the man who went down in history as **Yves Guérin-Sérac**. He was the founder of the **Aginter Presse** agency, a covert terrorist structure that was financed by Salazar's secret police and had links to Western intelligence services. Aginter Presse functioned as a control room for right-wing subversion from 1966 to 1974. Through the neo-fascist organisation **Ordine Nuovo**, Aginter Presse was involved in terrorist attacks in Italy, starting with the massacre in Piazza Fontana, and in **Operation Condor**, a CIA plan to eliminate opponents of South American dictatorships in the 1970s.

It is somewhat unusual for the grey eminence of international black terrorism to speak about universal love and the 'human family' at a religious festival, especially given the fact that he had been in hiding for decades when he was listed at the festival under his real name. Interestingly, however, this was not the first time Guérin-Serac had participated in events related to the world of alternative spirituality. The journalist Andrea Sceresini inform us that in 2002 Guérin-Sérac took part in a meeting of the Women's Federation for World Peace, an emanation of the **Unification Church**. What makes it all even more incomprehensible is that Guérin-Serac was anything but ecumenical, not only politically but also religiously. One man who knew him very well was the lifelong **Vincenzo Vinciguerra**, who was a member of the neo-fascist groups ‘Ordine Nuovo’ and ‘Avanguardia Nazionale’. He claimed that what struck him most about the figure who called himself Ralf at the time was his religiosity:

'Ralf was very Catholic. Fundamentalist Catholic!' In other words, he was not the type to attend new age festivals. Vinciguerra, however, added a further notation:

Christian civilisation was built on millions of dead and he had no qualms about doing the same to preserve it!

The traditionalist matrix

(a) the doctrine of double effect

The twisted logical and moral entanglements that characterise a particular environment in which the political right combines with religious radicalism are difficult to see through. For example, there are two glaring contradictions in the lines above. The first relates to the coexistence of the fundamentalist Catholic and the mass murderer in one and the same person - specifically in Guérin-Serac. The second contradiction is that of one who professes a form of Catholicism that is hostile to ecumenism, because he is fundamentalist, and actively participates in events organised by other cults. To solve these apparent puzzles, we need to unravel the skein and start where the thread of the story begins. Following it will take us to unimaginable places.

Figure 40 - OAS poster

The proximity of Catholic traditionalism to murders and terrorist attacks was already evident during the Algerian war. The OAS (Organisation Armée Secrète) was a French clandestine paramilitary organisation with the slogan 'French Algeria or death'. It was founded in Madrid in 1961 under the protection of Francisco Franco's fascist government and had as its main political reference the Catholic counter-revolutionary organisation La Cité Catolique, which supplied the OAS with numerous fighters. In fifteen months, the OAS caused around 1,500 deaths through terrorist attacks of unprecedented cruelty. After the Evian Agreement between the French government and the Algerian Liberation Front, which laid the foundations for Algerian independence from France, became known, the OAS decided to carry out an assassination attempt on de Gaulle, who was considered a traitor. This failed and the organisation disbanded.

As anomalous as it may seem, it should be noted that in Catholic circles linked to the military hierarchies, the practise of torture and murder was considered worthy of absolution. This was based on the ideas of Aristotle, St Thomas Aquinas and St Augustine of Hippo. Louis Delarue, chaplain of a unit deployed in Algeria, said that one had to choose between two evils, and letting a bandit temporarily suffer the death penalty was the lesser.

Probably the best justification for the nefarious deeds of Catholic activists was provided by St Thomas Aquinas' doctrine of the double effect: 'The evil caused by an action directed towards the good does not invalidate the morality of the action itself'.

Among the OAS volunteers was **Yves Guérin-Sérac**, who apparently based his mission on the logic of St Thomas, as he was later prepared to kill millions of people in order to achieve the goal of protecting traditional Christian society.

b) Subversion and revolution

After the defeat in Algeria, Guérin-Sérac and other OAS veterans fled first to Franco's Spain and then to Salazar's Portugal in order to avoid being sentenced for desertion and treason. It was here that the idea of founding an international anti-communist organisation took shape. This structure was to consist of specialists in the fight against '**subversion**'. This concept is of central importance. An important reference for the OAS fighters is said to have been **La Cité Catolique**. It is therefore appropriate to say a few words about this organisation. It was a Catholic counter-revolutionary organisation led by Jean Ousset. He saw the root of all evil in 'subversion'. By this he meant the distortion of the Christian order, natural law and the Creator's plan, a distortion that had been given its greatest impetus by the French Revolution.

Figure 41 - Jean Ousset

From the 1960s onwards, this fight against subversion also took the form of the defence of the 'white presence' in the few African territories that remained in European hands.

Ousset was not alone in this battle. The same struggle against modernity and the disruption of the natural order was waged in Brazil by Plinio Correa de Oliveira and his association Tradition, Family and Property. What Ousset called 'subversion', Correa de Oliveira called 'revolution'.

De Oliveira argued that Christianity had suffered a dramatic spiritual decline since the 15th century due to the spread of social egalitarianism and moral liberalism, which had put an end to the righteousness that had characterised mediaeval society.

He therefore considered it necessary to fully restore Christian civilisation through the **reintroduction of social hierarchies and aristocratic titles, as well as the dissolution of socialist parties**. De Oliveira was the advocate of a programme for the 'restoration of order', which was described as a return to a

Christian civilisation, austere and hierarchical, fundamentally sacred, anti-egalitarian and anti-liberal.

Figure 42 - Plinio Correa de Oliveira

TFP has remained true to this goal by actively participating in the efforts of reactionary forces to depose democratically elected presidents in Latin America, beginning with the coups in Brazil in 1964 and that of Pinochet in Chile in 1973. Margareth Power writes that the TFP maintained a "mutually supportive relationship" with Pinochet's dictatorship for seventeen years, justifying the violation of human rights with the overriding need to fight communism. This is the same logic used by the Catholic OAS military in Algeria.

Penny Lernoux points out that **the actions of the TFP were in line with the goals of the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)**, which not only supported

the coup but **even seems to have financed the TFP for its work against democracy in Chile** (page 297). There are even reports of martial arts training camps in Rio de Janeiro for members of the TFP, the army and the police.

In those years, the TFP forged links with the **World Anti-Communist League (WACL)**, which, according to Benjamin A. Cowan, was "a secretive and often questionable organisation whose activities in the second half of the 20th century ranged from spreading panic to overt or covert support for right-wing terrorism“ (page 156). The fifth WACL congress, held in Manila in 1971, was hosted by dictator Ferdinand Marcos and was attended by the Brazilian and Argentinian delegations of the TFP (Power, op.cit., p. 98).

In the 1980s, the TFP extended its reach further by joining forces with and co-founding the **International Policy Forum** of the US New Right theorist **Paul Weyrich**.

Plinio Correa de Oliveira and Jean Ousset did not like each other because the Brazilian found the Frenchman too socialist and because of his allusions to the French counter-revolutionary culture of the 19th century, which always harboured a certain hostility towards the ruling bourgeoisie, as he considered it to be secular and Masonic. However, the two lessons are composed in an Italian counter-revolutionary association that has both Ousset and de Oliveira as cultural references: **Alleanza Cattolica**.

c) Aginter Presse

Figure 43 - Advertising poster of the fake agency Aginter Presse

In May 1974, after the 'Carnation Revolution' had brought democracy back to Portugal, a group of soldiers stormed the premises of a press agency at Rua des Pracas 13 in Lisbon on the orders of an official from the PIDE, Salazar's secret police. The agency was **Aginter Presse**, founded by Guérin-Sérac. Analysis of the documents found revealed that the fake press agency was an international centre of subversion, the control and coordination room of an unconventional war, capable of carrying out espionage operations, organising attacks, training mercenaries and infiltrating revolutionary movements. The agency consisted of

- an espionage centre linked to the Portuguese secret services and other Western intelligence agencies, such as the **CIA** and the West German **Gehlen network**;

- a recruitment and training centre for mercenaries and terrorists specialising in attacks and sabotage, especially in Third World countries;

- a political organisation called **'Orde et Tradition'**, flanked by a military arm called **'Organisation d'Action Contre le Communisme International' (OACI)**.

In the Rua des Pracas archives, evidence was found of active cooperation between Aginter Presse and the security services of major Western countries, which commissioned the agency to carry out 'dirty' operations that were not officially allowed to be carried out by government agencies of democratic countries. The American services supported the agency, for example, in the anti-communist plan Stay Behind, in which the Italian paramilitary secret organisation Gladio was also involved. Relations with the American

intelligence were conducted via intermediary organisations that avoided directly financing the Aginter Presse.

Figure 44- John Birch Society: "This is a republic, not a democracy"

One of these organisations was the John Birch Society. This organisation of the economic and religious right is the prototype of a galaxy of conservative foundations and think tanks that form the backbone of American soft power. We will see later what role they play in supporting 'religious freedom" in the world.

This paradoxical struggle against subversion through subversion experienced its greatest stage in Italy with the so-called strategy of tension, which began with the Piazza Fontana bombing in 1969. The documents of Judge Salvini, who was in charge of investigating the massacre, clearly show that the agency and Guérin-Sérac himself were involved in the attack. In June 2005, the Court of Cassation ruled that the massacre was the work of a "subversive group founded in Padua within the **Ordine Nuovo'**, a neo-fascist group founded by Pino Rauti, whose links with Guérin-Sérac have been proven, as Judge Salvini also stated in the parliamentary commission of enquiry into the massacres. The relations between Ordine Nuovo and parts of the Italian secret service were so close that one cannot speak of a simple infiltration of the organisation into the security services , but of two parallel and coordinated structures. Ordine Nuovo was also referred to as the 'prosthesis of the deviated services'.

Figure 45 - Ordine Nuovo

The Ordine Nuovo also consisted of young people who were fascinated by mystical and esoteric cultures. Rauti himself had them practise magical

rituals. The culture of the Ordine Nuovo was permeated by an anti-modern, hierarchical and spiritualist attitude (see Stefania Limiti, Potere Occulto, ChiareLettere, 2022, p. 278).

Through the OAS and Aginter Presse, European neo-fascism underwent a strategic and fundamental change: from an anti-American and anti-Soviet stance to a defence of the West, even becoming a force defending Atlanticism.

This Atlanticist convergence does not abandon its goals; it merely changes its operational register. Instead of detonators and covert networks, it brings to the stage legal-moral frameworks capable of rebranding strategic interests as universal rights.

c) Alleanza Cattolica

Alleanza Cattolica was founded in 1968 by **Giovanni Cantoni** together with **Agostino Sanfratello**. Italian traditionalism, which saw its fulcrum in AC, was also always very critical of the "Risorgimento", the political and social movement that led to the unity of Italy in 19th century, which was seen as the Italian version of the French Revolution. Alleanza Cattolica was therefore dedicated to spreading revisionist interpretations of the history of the Risorgimento and the apologetics of the various 'insurrections', i.e. the Catholic popular uprisings against the liberal and democratic revolutions (Vendée in France, Sanfedistas in Italy, Cristeros in Mexico, etc.).

Sanfratello is close to the neo-fascist terrorist **Franco Freda** and was the mentor of **Roberto Fiore**, the founder of the extreme right-wing movement **Terza Posizione**. Freda was convicted for the 1969 bombings in Italy, then for incitement to racial hatred and subversive association. Fiore, on the other hand, was sentenced by the Italian judiciary in 1985 for the offences of

subversive association and armed gang. During his years as a fugitive, Fiore was protected by MI6 as an 'agent of British intelligence'. In 1991, the European Commission of Inquiry into Racism and Xenophobia confirmed his association with MI6 since the early 1980s. Fiore and Sanfratello are also the founders of the political movement "**Forza Nuova**", on whose lists Sanfratello himself stood as a candidate in 2003.

President of Forza Nuova was another representative of Italian catholicism, the jurist **Piero Vassallo,** author of an essay in defence of the Nazis in court in Nuremberg.

There are many lawyers in the AC. Among them is **Alfredo Mantovano**, who at the time of writing is Undersecretary of State in the Presidency of the Council of Ministers and responsible for the secret services.

However, the most influential lawyer in AC is **Massimo Introvigne**. He joined Alleanza Cattolica in 1972, and soon became the most active member of the association and one of the main signatories of the magazine "Cristianità", the official organ of AC. In 2008, he even succeeded founder Cantoni, who had suffered a stroke, in the official role of 'Reggente Vicario', but effectively at the head of the organisation (Cantoni only retained the position of Regent in an honorary capacity). Introvigne continued the tradition of insurrectionary apologetics by founding the **Centre for Counter-Revolutionary Studies (CESCOR)** in Turin.

But what is Alleanza cattolica?

The organisation says it is committed to defending the 'social doctrine of the Church', where 'social doctrine' has nothing to do with a commitment to solving social problems, but rather with the instructions that believers should follow in the public sphere according to the principles of 'natural morality'. De Mattei writes:

Giovanni Cantoni's encounter with Professor Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira, whose major work Revolution and Counter-Revolution became the basic text for the training of young fighters, was decisive for him.

As Introvigne himself told me in a private communication, "Alleanza Cattolica has always 'navigated' between Correa de Oliveira and Ousset, recognising that there was also a pluralism within the counter-revolutionary world, participating in Ousset's famous Lausanne congresses and maintaining no less friendly relations with this world than with the TFP."

Ultimately, the Alleanza Cattolica moves between the organisation that was dear to the OAS fighters (and whose veterans flowed into the Aginter Presse) and the Brazilian association that collaborated with the South American caudillos protected by the CIA.

d) neocon slip

From the mid-1980s, Tradition, Family and Property came under considerable fire from the institutions. A scandal had already shaken the image of the TFP in France at the end of the 1970s. The Saint Benoit school, founded by the TFP in Chateauroux in 1977, hit the headlines when former members of the association and concerned family members denounced the indoctrination of children that took place there through manipulative pressure and led to negative effects on their relationships with their families. This indoctrination allegedly led the children to fully identify with the organisation and its goals, which had a negative impact on their family relationships. In particular, many students were made to see their parents, especially fathers with prestigious

professional positions, as an expression of the 'revolutionary' values that the organisation was supposed to combat.

A report on the school's aberrations entitled 'Tradition, Family, Property. Catholic association or millenarian sect?" was compiled by anonymous writers.

Among the other accusations made in the dossier was the excessive veneration of the founder's mother, Mrs Lucilia, whose locks of hair were elevated to the status of relics. Following this report, the school was closed. At a court hearing in 1982, it was established that the students had been subjected to psychological measures to make them members of the organisation.

Figure 46 - TFP's book that inaugurated the strand of criticism of brainwashing

In 1984, following a parliamentary investigation, Venezuela banned the TFP, accusing it of practising forms of psychological conditioning of its followers. The following year, the Brazilian Bishops' Conference declared that the TFP was incompatible with the Church 'because of its esoteric character, its religious fanaticism, the cult reserved for the personality of its founder and his mother and the improper use of the name of the Virgin Mary' (XXIII National Assembly of the Brazilian Bishops' Conference, Itaici, 18 April 1985). Two things then happened. Firstly, the TFP published a haphazard pamphlet destined, however, to inaugurate a fortunate thread and entitled ***Brainwashing. A Myth Exploited by the New 'Therapeutic Inquisition.*** Its central theme was that mental manipulation was a myth used to combat religion by a fictitious and conspiratorial 'anti-cult movement' made up of psychiatrists and communists. in 1991, TFP reiterated this by publishing in French "The New Atheist and

Psychiatric Inquisition Calls Those They Wants to Destroy 'Cults'", by Gustavo Antonio and Luís Sérgio Solimeo, ed. Société Française pour la Defence de la Tradition, Famille et Propriété, Paris 1991, translation of a Spanish text from 1985), which already makes the concept clear in the title.

The second event was that Correa de Oliveira and his followers suddenly developed a vision in which they saw Christian America as the only counter-revolutionary force capable of responding to European secularism, the fruit of the French Revolution, and the 'Marxisation" of the Latin Church, which had gone so far as to criticise Tradition (and even TFP).

Tradition, Family and Property has collaborated with representatives and associations of American conservatism such as **Paul Weyrich** and the Council for National Policy (CNP). This is a secret organisation described by the New York Times as 'a little-known club of a few hundred of the country's most influential conservatives' that meets three times a year behind closed doors at undisclosed locations for a confidential conference.

The European sister organisations of TFP, such as Alleanza Cattolica and the Lepanto Foundation, have taken the same stance, allying themselves with American neoconservatism in the fight against secularism and defending 'religious freedom". De Mattei (Lepanto Foundation) is a member of the board of experts of the Heritage Foundation and the American Enterprise Institute as well as the Acton Institute - some of the most active think tanks in the American neoconservative galaxy. Introvgne himself writes in his book on Plinio Correa de Oliveira (*Una battaglia nella notte*, 2008) that TFP has succeeded in linking with the American right "**a set of interests involving the major foundations around which conservative culture revolves**" (p. 210).

All of these associations are part of a vast network of Christian pro-free market organisations called the Atlas Network, which is known to operate [...] as a silent extension of US foreign policy, [...] think tanks associated with Atlas receive silent funding from the State Department and the National Endowment for Democracy, an essential arm of American soft power. American soft power.

from Lee Fang writes this in *Sphere of influence: How American libertarians are remaking Latin American politics*, The Intercept, 9 August 2017

In view of this change in political perspective, the foundation of a new institution from the AC in 1988 seems to follow the same logical sequence. This was the **Centro Studi Nuove Religioni (**Centre for the Study of New Religions**), CESNUR.** Its founder and director is **Massimo Introvigne**.

e) CESNUR, the counter- revolution with the mask

Figure 47 - CESNUR's logo

CESNUR is a well-known research centre for 'new religious movements' that claims to be 'independent of any religious or denominational organisation'. Although Introvigne has often responded to criticism of the dubious neutrality of a centre for the study of religions whose main representatives are members of Alleanza Cattolica (e.g. Pierluigi Zoccatelli, Marco Respinti and Andrea Menegotto) by pointing out that CESNUR has nothing to do with

Alleanza cattolica and works in an avalutative and scientific manner, it was Introvigne himself who declared in 1993:

Thus, the activists of Alleanza Cattolica, together with others, have founded and run CESNUR, the Centre for the Study of New Religions, [... ...] within the context of an apologetic response that does not fail to return to the broader framework of the dramatic struggle between evangelisation and anti-evangelisation, and thus, in the language of the Catholic counter-revolutionary school from which Alleanza Cattolica draws its inspiration, between revolution and counter-revolution, a framework whose thematic presentation constitutes one of the main objectives of the association.

In 'La questione della nuova religiosità' by Massimo Introvigne, published by Cristianità, 1993 (ISBN 88-85236-14-6).

"The Catholic counter-revolutionary school from which Alleanza Cattolica draws its inspiration' and which forms the backbone of CESNUR's activities is that of Ousset and Correa de Oliveira.

Over the years, CESNUR has emerged as the main actor in favour of 'religious freedom", presenting itself as a scientific authority entitled to defend the cults criticised by the so-called 'anti-cult movement', which is hostile to free belief. This includes spreading the idea in publications and at congresses that spiritual manipulation does not exist. We are once again faced with the paradox from which we started, namely that Catholic traditionalism thunderstruck by ecumenism on the road to Damascus. Perhaps it was not Damascus.

Figure 48 - Introvigne, highlighted in the red circle, at a panel organised by Scientology and the Universal Peace Federation (new name for the Unification Church) in Buenos Aires on 22 March 2023

From Dirty War to Clean Frame: FoRB as a Soft Power Tool

In the vacuum between the end of the Cold War and globalization, the formula ***Freedom of Religion or Belief*** **(FoRB)** became part of the lingua franca of the new soft power. In the United States, the ***International Religious Freedom Act*** (1998) institutionalized the field, creating a roaming ambassador, a dedicated State Department office, and a federal commission capable of producing lists, designations, and sanctioning levers: the ***United States Commission for International Religious Freedom*** **(USCIRF)**. An imposing apparatus was established—an itinerant ambassador, a dedicated office at the State Department, a federal commission, and annual reports—that in theory was meant to elevate religious freedom to a universal standard of judgment. In practice, as Eugenia Relaño Pastor has shown (*The Flawed Implementation of the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998: A European Perspective*, 2005), its application has proved selective and contradictory: systemic rivals such as China, Iran, or Sudan were regularly sanctioned, while strategic allies such as Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, or Uzbekistan were spared despite serious violations. The legal-moral framework that promised neutrality was bent to the needs of realpolitik, especially in the context of the "war on terror," turning a principle of universal scope into a tool of diplomatic pressure. From a European perspective, this undermined the credibility of the initiative, obstructing the construction of genuine multilateral dialogue and confirming the suspicion that FoRB was less a right to be guaranteed for all and more a lever of soft power serving U.S. foreign policy. Pastor is not the only critic of this distorted

use of the FoRB principle. Already in 2015, Elizabeth Shakman Hurd's *Beyond Religious Freedom: The New Global Politics of Religion* criticized the state's use of religious freedom as an instrument of foreign policy.

In Europe, the formula is translated into a parliamentary format: intergroups that declare they defend freedom of belief, events and hearings that multiply visibility, motions that embed the theme into the EU's external agenda. The FoRB Intergroup in the European Parliament is today dominated by the far right, with figures like Carlo Fidanza (*Fratelli d'Italia*) and Joachim Kuhs (AfD) who have turned the religion-and-identity agenda into an anti-Islamic crusade. Some analysts denounce its "instrumental" drift: not a pluralist forum, but **a tribune for radical right-wing forces** that redefine religious freedom according to identitarian logics (cf. critiques in specialized media, analyses of European lobbying networks).

This is the "glass-fronted" version of what used to run in the "backroom": no rogue services or suitcases of cash, but policy briefs, press conferences, and reports that—properly amplified—create reputations and discredit others. The change is not cosmetic: the FoRB framework shifts the burden of proof—those who criticize certain movements become "anti-cult" illiberals; those who defend them gain credentials as guardians of rights.

Into this framework insert themselves, with striking synchronicity, thematic NGOs and para-academic networks converging on the FoRB keyword: ***Human Rights Without Frontiers***, **CAP LC**, **FOB**, and the **CESNUR**/***Bitter Winter*** circuit provide analyses, testimonies, and dossiers that ricochet between think tanks, parliamentary hearings, and "friendly" media. **The Brussels-Media/*The European Times*** circuit, linked to **Scientology**, works as an echo chamber: it relaunches press releases, humanizes protagonists, and polarizes cases. The result is a corridor of legitimization for highly controversial groups—from Scientology to Jehovah's Witnesses, to new Asian and Latin American religious

movements—that find systematic and prejudicial refuge under the umbrella of the "persecuted minority."

The **evangelical component** in the United States is not an ornamental detail, but a transmission belt. In the 1970s–1990s, that constellation pushed Washington to elevate religious freedom to a guiding criterion; in the post-1998 setup, it provides political personnel, platforms, and supporting foundations. It is in this contact zone that sectarian lobbies graft themselves: not because they share evangelical theology, but because they share the utility of the FoRB frame. Ecumenism here is not doctrinal: it is instrumental.

Geopolitical selectivity is the natural consequence of the device. FoRB reliably denounces systemic enemies; sometimes downplays uncomfortable allies; and almost always neutralizes the category "sect" as a persecutory construct, replacing it with "new religious minority." The result is a short circuit: crimes or internal abuses become "controversial cases"; those who document them are portrayed as moral panic-mongers. The frame does not annul facts but re-frames them: from judicial issue to rights issue.

On this terrain a division of labor flourishes. **FoRB-centric NGOs handle advocacy, research centers provide legitimizing knowledge, media platforms set the agenda, while some congregations (like Scientology) invest in professional lobbying in Washington and Brussels.** It is a coherent ecosystem: dossier → event → article → parliamentary question → resolution. And when needed, coordinated campaigns against "anti-cult" actors shift the semantic axis from the content of accusations to the alleged illiberalism of the accuser.

The point is not to deny that FoRB is a real right; it is to show how it is used. In the hands of this network, freedom of religion becomes **a reputational currency**: it grants narrative immunity to groups with structural abuse problems, offers governments and parties a moral lever against competitors, and provides the media with a frictionless story: persecuted vs persecutors. A simple grammar, with high symbolic yield.

In this new syntax, the old ideological personnel readjust: counter-revolution sheds the uniform, dons the blue jacket of institutional conferences, speaks the lexicon of fundamental rights, gathers endorsements and civil society badges. **It is the natural evolution of the black network: from covert action to cognitive cover.**

Figure 49 - The book by J.M. Bale where CESNUR is described as an organisation whose sub rosa agenda is to fight against secularism

Jeffrey M. Bale of the Middlebury Institute of International Studies, arguably the foremost international expert on political and religious extremism, terrorism, unconventional warfare and covert political operations, does not hesitate to write in the second volume of **The Darkest Side of Politics** that unconventional warfare play a role organisations, promote "**political and religious agendas that, in the name of religious and democratic freedoms, actually aim to defend extremist, totalitarian and anti-democratic groups from investigation, criticism and possible state repression, and more generally to resist or even drive back secular humanism, liberalism and modernism in the West**". The expert adds that **'perhaps the most important case of these organisations is CESNUR'**.. The 'sub rosa' agenda of defending religious freedom with paradoxical 'liberal' arguments (since its director is a 'right-wing Catholic activist'), the "sub rosa" agenda of this centre is to fight against secularism.

Seen this way, CESNUR appears as the “cognitive” version of the Aginter Presse. That was the control and coordination room of a physical and psychological war against communism; CESNUR is the control room of a cultural and cognitive influence war against secularism.

Indeed, Massimo Introvigne still describes French secularism today as a consequence of the Jacobin terror (revolution, subversion), whose heirs would be the government agency Mission interministérielle de vigilance et de lutte contre les dérives sectaires (MIVILUDES) and the Fédération Européenne des Centres de Recherche et d'Information sur le Sectarisme (FECRIS), a French organisation that brings together European associations for the defence of and information on the sectarian phenomenon. He writes in an article dated 9 May 2023:

France, even more than Germany, has always been the European country that has made intolerance of religion almost a national sport. Article 2 of the French constitution consists of the famous motto liberté, egalité, fraternité. [...] Not everyone knows that the full text originally contained the closing words 'ou la mort'. [...] After 240 years, the anti-religious mentality of a certain France has still not completely disappeared. [...]

In short, the enemy is still Robespierre.

Figure 50 - Introvigne, who has taken off the shoes of the traditionalist Catholic for the time it takes him to put on the shoes of the scholar, visits the temple of Satan

V- Attack on Secularism

Pre-trial acquittals

On July 8 2022, former Japanese Prime Minister **Shinzo Abe,** a long-time right-wing politician, was assassinated during a rally in the city of Nara. The assassin, Tetsuya Yamagami, claimed to have killed him because he blamed him for the spread of the **Unification Church** in Japan, an organisation to which his mother had allegedly donated so much that it ruined the family. As the Financial Times reports, the link between the Unification Church and members of Abe's political party is an old one. Nobusuke Kishi, father-in-law of Abe's father, who was prime minister of Japan in the second half of the 20th century, supported the church as **an instrument in the anti-communist struggle**. Over time, the Unification Church served as a safe reservoir of votes for the Liberal Democratic Party, Abe's nationalist party.

According to the founder "Reverend" **Sun Myung Moon**, humanity fell from grace when Eve fornicated with the fallen angel Lucifer, who later became Satan. As a result of this perversion of God's love, all of Adam's descendants inherited a contaminated bloodline and were alienated from God. Eventually, God sent Jesus as the Messiah to redeem humankind, but God's plan to purify mankind's sinful bloodline by having Jesus marry and start a family did not work out. As Plan B, God sent the Messiah Sun Myung Moon, who embodied the Second Coming. Mass weddings are part of the plan. The idea is that two believers, chosen and brought together by the Messiah, will be united as husband and wife with the blessing of the Messiah and their children will be born free from sin.

The church is a business empire that includes a car factory, a huge manufacturing company, several hospitals, and major property investments around the world. Among other things, it owns one of the largest seafood export companies in the world and has helped to popularise sushi in the

USA and from there to the rest of the West. He also owns the conservative newspaper **Washington Times**. Naturally, he plays a major political role. In 2003, Moon caused a stir with a sermon in which he claimed that the Holocaust was the just punishment inflicted on the Jews for the murder of Jesus.

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Figure 51 - Shinzo AbeSun Myung Moon and Hyung Jin 'Sean' Moon

The founder's son, **Hyung Jin 'Sean' Moon**, is no less right-wing. He founded **The Rod of Iron Ministries** in the USA. The 'rod of iron' is the AR-15 submachine gun; in fact, the church worships firearms, which it describes as 'religious equipment'. The leader wears a crown of bullets and the faithful participate in ceremonies armed with this equipment. The church has strong ties to American Identititarian and far-right movements.

In August 2025, former South Korean First Lady **Kim Keon-hee** was arrested in Seoul on charges of corruption, stock market manipulation, and election interference. She is the wife of former President **Yoon Suk-yeol**, who is already in prison for insurrection and high treason — marking the first time in South Korea's history that a former president and his spouse have been jailed simultaneously.

According to prosecutors, Kim allegedly accepted expensive gifts from the **Unification Church** in exchange for political favors, inflated stock values, and interfered in candidate nominations. The investigation has uncovered a

suspected pact between figures in the **People Power Party** (PPP) and the religious movement, which is believed to have mobilized funds and followers to support Yoon in the 2022 presidential election and influence the party's leadership race in 2023.

Reports indicate that in March 2022, shortly before the presidential election, Unification Church leader **Hak Ja Han** publicly expressed support for Yoon Suk-yeol, prompting the organization to transfer tens of millions of won to local PPP leaders to boost his campaign. To this end, **Yoon Young-ho** allegedly convened the heads of five regional church districts, urging them to back Yoon's candidacy and promising political benefits for the movement in return.

The **Democratic Party** has dubbed the scandal the "**Unification Church Gate",** accusing the PPP of having turned into a political arm of a religious group, and has vowed to fully expose the scope of the affair through a special investigation. "If a religious organization mobilizes money and resources to influence elections, it is an unacceptable anti-democratic act," said party spokesperson **Baek Seung-ah**.

The probe into Kim, Yoon, and their alleged accomplices goes beyond corruption charges: it aims to shed light on a possible secret pact between political power and religious organizations. Investigations are ongoing to determine the full extent of these ties.

Back in Japan, the links between the Liberal Democratic Party and the church became clear after the death of the former prime minister. Since then, dozens of party members, including those in top positions, have admitted their links to the church or other related organisations.

The government subsequently launched an investigation into Moon's church and on 12 October 2023 declared its intention to request the dissolution of the church.

Figure 52- Faithful of The Rod of Iron Ministries

However, the church has many friends. When the US Congress cut off funding to the Reagan administration in 1985 to support the Nicaraguan '**Contras**' terrorists against the Sandinista regime, **Reverend Moon's Unification Church** became involved in providing food and money for the guerrillas (see further ahead). Ford Greene reports that **CAUSA**, a company of the Moonies, provided thousands of dollars and tonnes of food, medicine and clothing to the guerrilla forces. In 1985, the Moonies' newspaper, the **Washington Times**, set up a private fund for the Contras and announced that Bo Hi Pak, the paper's official publisher, had contributed $100,000 to raise $14 million. When asked how the paper could afford this, the publisher explained that the paper's owners (the Moon organisation) were willing to provide extraordinary help on important moral issues (i.e. the fight against communism).

The extensive ties between **Paul Weyrich's Council for National Policy (CNP)**, closely connected with the Brazilian **Family and Property Tradition,** and the Unification Church were discussed at length in an AFN radio interview by Kelleigh Nelson with Chey Simonton. In 1978, the Fraser Commission, a subcommittee of the US Congress, investigated the South Korean government's political interference in US policy, known as **Koreagate**. The commission published a report in which Moon's involvement in activities with the US government was also listed.

It was recently revealed that former US President Donald Trump received around 2.5 million dollars from the **Universal Peace Federation (UPF)**, the new

denomination of the **Unification Church**, to make video appearances on three occasions between 2021 and 2022, while former Vice President Mike Pence received 550,000 dollars to speak at a UPF event. This was confirmed by the Mainichi Shimbun newspaper by obtaining official US documents and comparing them with court documents in Japan. The event took place in 2022, and the director of CESNUR Massimo Introvigne, who gave a talk at the meeting, was also funded by the UPF (Fig. 53).

Figure 53 - The giant picture of the CESNUR director on stage at the URF in 2022 in Seoul

Obviously, **CESNUR** immediately came to the aid of the Unification Church after the murder of Abe. The prompt intervention of a group of Westerners in defence of a controversial religious movement reminded someone in Japan of what happened in 1995 after the **Tokyo underground attack** by the **Aum Shinrikyo** (The Supreme Truth) cult. The religious group's followers had punched plastic bags of sarin gas, a nerve agent, into underground cars in Tokyo, killing 13 people and poisoning over 6,200. **Gordon Melton** of CESNUR USA was paid by the group responsible for the terrorist attack even before he arrived in Japan with another pair of experts to defend the cult. A preemptive payment for a prejudicial defence. Melton has in fact written several books that were directly commissioned and paid for by various groups, including the **Ramtha School of Enlightenment**; the same groups then ensured the distribution of his books. This was also done years ago by the **Unification Church** of Moon in Italy with a book by Introvigne. In any case, this funding appears to be just the crumbs of a much larger loaf.

Figure 54- People intoxicated by sarin gas in the Tokyo underground in 1995

Returning to the Abe case, Introvigne writes in an article in the 'Journal of CESNUR' that "While the weak mind of the assassin had clearly been excited by anti-Unification-Church campaigns by militant lawyers and **anti-cultists**, the latter succeeded in **persuading most media, both in Japan and internationally, that rather than being a victim the Unification Church was somewhat responsible for the homicide, in a spectacular reversal of both logic and fairness**" (bold mine).

In other words, Shinzo Abe was killed by the 'anti-cult movement'. Regardless of the reader's assessment of where the 'spectacular reversal of logic' lies, this blanket defence exemplifies a tendency towards prejudicial absolution of the cults under criticism, which is hardly consistent with the claims of a rigorous study centre. Some examples of this same prejudged absolution sometimes border on the ridiculous.

In March 2020, at the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, a Korean religious movement called **Shincheonji Church of Jesus** was accused of contributing to the spread of the virus in the Asian country by preventing its believers from adhering to government regulations and organising crowded prayer meetings without social distancing or masks. More than 60% of those infected in the country were church members. The propaganda machine for new religious movements immediately rushed to the sect's aid and published a 'white paper' titled Shincheonji and the Coronavirus in South Korea: Separating Facts from Fantasies. A few days later, the head of the church, along with 12 other

members of the sect, apologised on his knees in front of television cameras for causing the outbreak.

Figure 55 - Lee Man Hee, leader of the Shincheonji Churchpublicly apologises for helping to spread the Covid-19 virus in South Korea

Timing does not seem to be CESNUR's strong point. The year before, **CESNUR** had already shown how difficult it is to deal with the absolving impulse - with disastrous results. In May 2019, the study centre presented the FIRMA awards (International Festival of Religions, Music and Arts) at the Turin book fair. This prize was created by the Introvigne think tank to honour those who have distinguished themselves in promoting peace through interreligious dialogue.

In this edition, Apostle **Naasón Joaquín García**, leader of the **Luz del Mundo** church, was among those honoured. A few weeks after being honoured as an advocate of human rights and author of charitable works, Naasón Joaquín García was arrested in Los Angeles on 26 charges, including human trafficking, production of child pornography and rape of minors. The trial ended with a plea by the apostle and his sentencing to 17 years in prison.

I admit that I have occasionally mocked the director of CESNUR for this unfortunate faux pas. I was answered verbatim: 'I would - and I do not rule this out - give Luz del Mundo in the person of its legal representative pro tempore an award for charitable activities, because I know them and they are admirable', and then concluded: 'The intention was to reward charitable activities, not the apostle's private life'.

I invite the reader to watch the documentary film about Garcia and the Luz del Mundo on the Netflix platform (The Darkness within la Luz del Mundo) and

then read Introvigne's sentence again. However, it should be mentioned that Introvigne's wife claims that there is a conspiracy between the anti-cult movement and Netflix. This is not a joke (see here).

It is likely that Introvigne's inclination to continue bestowing awards upon the works of *La Luz del Mundo* will not waver even after the latest developments. In fact, on September 10, 2025, García was **indicted on a new series of federal charges — racketeering, sex trafficking, production of child pornography, exploitation of minors, illicit financing, and destruction of evidence**.The indictment describes a criminal enterprise that allegedly exploited the religious structure of *La Luz del Mundo* for decades, sexually abusing minors and women, coercing them through religious and financial pressure, and operating in both Mexico and the United States. If convicted on all counts, García faces **life imprisonment** — though perhaps he will have a new award hanging on his cell wall.

As if that weren't enough, authorities in the state of Michoacán, Mexico, have arrested 38 members of *La Luz del Mundo* who were participating in a **"training camp" involving weapons (replicas, knives, tactical gear)** in the central region of the state (apnews.com).

Damn Netflix!

Figure 56 and 57- left: The CESNUR leader Introvigne with that of the Luz del Mundo Garcia - right: Garcia during the trial

Although a character as colourful as the Mexican apostle can steal the show with such theatrical plot twists that are not devoid of irony, it is another award winner, **Greg Mitchell**, who deserves our attention. We have already met him. He is the chief lobbyist for Scientology and founder of the International

Religious Freedom Roundtable. (see Fascists, spies and gurus. 3. The cult apologists). The activities of this loyalist of the American religious holding company are not only regularly reported on institutional websites, but Mitchell himself explained in an interview with 'Business Insider' that the church's lobbying work with the US government is currently not focussed on promoting Scientology, but on 'religious freedom". This work **'often involves working with other religious organisations to encourage the United States to put pressure on foreign countries that persecute religious groups'**. In other words, Scientology, along with 'other religious groups," encourages the U.S. government to 'exert pressure' on foreign countries.

Thus, exerting pressure on other countries for their actual or perceived interference or restraint in religious affairs is not a conclusion based on circumstantial evidence, but a stated intention pursued by a variety of actors who, even if they have different motivations, consider such action congruent. A convergence of interests, even if they pursue theoretically opposing goals. Here it is useful for Christian fundamentalists to defend movements that are far removed from Christianity.

This activity is already provided for by the **International Religious Freedom Act** of 1998, regardless of the spur of Scientology and other cults. Or not?

Attack on secularism

In **1995, a French government parliamentary committee of enquiry into cults produced a report, the so-called Guyard report**, which expressed great concern about the phenomenon. Similar initiatives followed in Belgium (1996), Germany (1997) and Italy (1998).

in 1996, France adopted a series of laws to protect the victims of 'cults' and, above all, an **inter-ministerial mission to combat cults** (MILS, later **MIVILUDES**), whose first president was the socialist MP Alain Vivien. This

made the country of laicité the spearhead of the resistance against the infiltration of totalitarian groups in Europe and triggered a process that led to the creation of the **Fédération Européenne des Centres de Recherche et d'Information sur le Sectarisme (FECRIS)**, the 'umbrella organisation" bringing together dozens of anti-cult associations from various European countries, and the adoption of the **About Picard law**, which criminalised the 'abuse of weakness' in 2001.

On June 6 1997, the interior ministers of the federal and state governments in Germany agreed to place the Scientology organisation under surveillance. This was just one of the measures taken by the German government to crack down on Scientology (a 1998 report emphasised the destructive aspects of this "commercial institution disguised as a religion" and a 2007 report by the Ministry of the Interior described the organisation as "incompatible with the constitution"). This was followed by the Scientology campaign against Germany (which is conceivable), but also a series of strong statements in defence of the cult by the US government (which is less conceivable). Other actions included a document by the **Beareau for Democracy, Human Rights and Labour (BDHRL)**, an agency of the US State Department, in which Germany is listed alongside countries such as China among the countries that violate religious freedom.

In 1998, the International Religious Freedom Act was promulgated, making the defence of religious freedom in the world US foreign policy. This act established a new department of the US government, which emerged from the Department of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour. Thus was born the Office of **International Religious Freedom (OIRF)**. In practise, this was a specialised body designed to combat 'discriminatory' policies towards alternative spiritual groups. It was decided that the office would be headed by an authorised ambassador, flanked by no fewer than five officials from the State Secretariat. The Commission even had its own representative in all

American embassies. Its first chairman was **Robert A. Seiple**. The curious thing is that this former marine was for more than 11 years the head of **World Vision Inc.**, the world's most important evangelical association promoting ultra-conservative views (and rumoured to be controlled by the CIA). One would have expected a department concerned with religious freedom to bear the traits of secularism, or at least not to have dogmatic traits that clash with a mission that could be labelled 'ecumenical', i.e. giving equal dignity to all religions and allowing them to coexist.

The fact is that the Commission's first report in September 1998 accused France, Germany, Austria and Belgium of violating religious freedom. The OIRF was soon joined by a new organisation, the **Commission on Religious Freedom**. This commission was made up of American parliamentarians who made representations to the **Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)**. During a meeting of the OSCE in 1999, these parliamentarians were the protagonists of a fierce attack on France, which was accused of the nefariousness of the 'Vichy regime', of witch-hunting and persecution. A diplomatic incident almost occurred. The delegation from the Religious Freedom Commission was led by Benjamin A. Gillman, whose election campaign was financed by Scientology (see Fascists, spies and gurus. 3. The cult apologists). The session was moderated by **Massimo Introvigne.**

In September 1999, the OIRF published an even harsher report against the European countries, forcing French Foreign Minister Hubert Védrine to write to his American counterpart Madeleine Albright to denounce the intolerable aggression that was calling into question the fruitfulness of the dialogue. This led to the termination of diplomatic dialogue on the issue.

To complete the picture of the forces on the ground, a third body of the US government was added, this time directly linked to the White House. It is **the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF)**. Yes, the commission that wrote the report advising Trump to obstruct the work of the FECRIS spokesman at the OSCE (c'est moi!). It's worth taking a closer look.

An American commission

The United States Commission for International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) is an advisory body to the US government that produces an annual report on religious freedom in the world. It consists of only 9 members, 5 from the President's party and 4 from the largest opposition party. It was established with the passage of the **International Religious Freedom Act** of 1998, which promotes **religious freedom as part of US foreign policy**.

The report produced by this commission in 2020 was very tough on the so-called "anti-cult movement', in particular the Federation of European Anti-Cult Associations, the Fédération européenne des centres de recherche et d'information sur le sectarisme (FECRIS).

According to the responsible USCIRF in 2020, scientists, activists and associations that campaign for the rights of cult victims would carry out 'hate campaigns' and restrict civil rights. The 2020 report also contains a recommendation to the US President to

> [...] combat the propaganda against the new religious movements disseminated by the European Federation of Research and Information Centres on Sectarianism (FECRIS) at the OSCE's annual Human Dimensions conference by sharing information regarding the continued involvement of individuals

and entities, operating as part of the anti-sectarian movement, in the suppression of religious freedom (sic).

In practise, it is proposed that **individuals (!!)** and organisations active in the fight against abusive cults should be monitored...

The most worrying thing for me is that I am one of these people! In fact, I was - and still am - the one who carries out the 'propaganda against new religious movements' at the OSCE.

Figure 58 - The author of this dossier as a speaker at the OSCE in Warsaw in 2023. Next to him, for reasons of schedule, is Ivan Arjona Pelado of Scientology

At the time the 2020 report was written, the President was Donald Trump. If you know how the commission that drafted this document was composed, there are some surprises and curiosities.

The vice president was **Tony Perkins**. He is also chairman of the Family Research Council, a fundamentalist Protestant organisation. The Family Research Council is against pornography, embryonic stem cell research, abortion, divorce and LGBT rights. The FRC believes that "homosexual behaviour is harmful to the people who practise it and to society in general and can never be affirmed. It is therefore a vice and a sin. Paedophilia would be a problem related to homosexuality. Questionable but legitimate positions, of course, but not the ones one would expect from those who have to pass judgement on discrimination and 'hate speech'. In fact, the **Southern Poverty**

Law Center classified the FRC as an anti-gay hate group in 2010 because the group "makes false claims about the LGBT community based on discredited research and junk science" to block LGBT civil rights.

Now, the Family Research Council is among the organisations cited in a study by OpenDemocracy for sending money to Europe to fund the activities of associations that aim to prevent the affirmation of individual rights.

As if that was not enough, Opendecracy itself had previously found the Family Research Council among the religious right associations in the US that have funded campaigns against sex education, contraception, abortion and LGBT rights in Africa.

Figure 59 - Manhatthan Declaration: 'Under no circumstances will we give to Caesar what is God's'.

Another component of the USCIRF was **Gary L. Bauer**, the former president of the FRC. In November 2009, Bauer signed an ecumenical statement called the "**Manhattan Declaration**" in which he called on Evangelical, Catholic and Orthodox Christians to disregard government regulations and laws that they felt would force them to support or simply allow abortion, same-sex marriage and other issues that go against their religious conscience.

It seems odd, to say the least, that someone who calls for defiance of the law and is adamantly opposed to recognising the rights enshrined in the Constitution is a member of a commission that oversees respect for civil rights and liberty.

Another component was **Johnnie Moore.** The latter is Trump's 'evangelical advisor' and advocate of American hegemony. He is president of the **Congress**

of Christian Leaders, a group monitored by **Right-Wing Watch**, an independent body that monitors all right-wing subversive groups.

Nadine Maenza, another member of the committee, is executive director of **Rick Santorum's Patriot Voices PAC** for the Defence of Conservative Values. He apparently opposes abortion and same-sex marriage and has adopted the image of the 'culture warrior' in the war on civil liberties during his tenure in the Senate. Santorum is a supporter of the group **Regnum Christi**, which is affiliated with the **Legionaries of Christ**, a highly controversial group at the centre of a major scandal. During his tenure as senator, Santorum authored the Santorum Amendment, which promoted the teaching of creationism and intelligent design in schools and opposed the teaching of evolutionary theory.

Another component is **Nury Turkel ,** Senior Fellow at the **Hudson Institute**, a conservative-oriented US think tank.

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Figure 60 - Tony Perkins, Gary L. Bauer, Johnnie Moore, Nadine Maenza

If we expand the search for the components that have alternated over the years in the USCRIF, we find that the relationships between them and the associations of the **Atlas Network** are very frequent. We know that these Christian-pro-free market organizations are "a 'silent extension of US foreign policy.'" In USCIRF we find representatives of the **Federalist Society** (such as

Leonard Leo, Chairman of USCIRF in 2009), the **American Enterprise Institute** (such as John R. Bolton, former appointee) or organisations linked to them such as the **Hudson Institute** (such as Nury Turkel, appointee). In 2018, USCIRF endorsed international Senator **Sam Brownback** as a religious freedom ambassador, who was among the speakers at a Brussels conference along with Scientology and Eurosceptic politicians. His election campaign in Kansas was financed by Koch Industries, one of the founders of the anarcho-capitalist organisation **Americans for Prosperity**, which is linked to **Amway (**see the next chapter**)**.

Figure 61- Elliott Abrams

However, the first president is enough to raise doubts about the USCIRF. He is **Elliott Abrams**, a leading representative of the neoconservatives, who was sentenced to a year in prison for his involvement in the **Iran-Contras scandal**. This involved the notorious financing of the war in Nicaragua against the democratically elected Sandinista government through the illegal sale of weapons to Iran. Among the crimes committed in connection with this sordid operation was the importation of cocaine by the CIA from the Contras, the anti-Sandinista guerrillas, and the subsequent obstruction of justice in the US Department of Justice. Abrams was one of the men involved in this affair and is also accused of being involved in the massacres in Guatemala and El Salvador when he was in charge of Latin America under Reagan. He has often accused the Israeli Likud of excessive tenderness towards the Palestinians. This champion of rights and ecumenism was chairman of the Commission on Religious Freedom International until 2000 and was still a member in 2022!

In 2023, the Parlament of the World's Religions was held in Chicago with representatives from **USCRIF**, **Scientology** and the director of the **Centre for the Study of New Religions (CESNUR)** Massimo Introvigne (fig. 62).

This is not about the ideas of the USCIRF majority commissioners who wrote the 2020 report, but about the paradox that those who advocate these ideas want to pose as defenders of civil liberties. So it seems clear that this commission, which was unsurprisingly created as an additional arm (there were already three US government bodies for religious freedom) at the promulgation of the International Religious Freedom Act, has the function of reacting to the contrary policy put into practice by France and which hinders the geopolitical vision underlying that policy document.

Figure 62 - Eric Roux (Scientology) posts on Facebook the news of the meeting held together with the USCIRF with Massimo Introvigne also present

Appendix: Taiwan as Tortuga pro-cult

For years, numerous conferences and seminars on respect for religious freedom have been held in Taipei, the capital of Taiwan. CESNUR, but also representatives of various cults, such as the Church of Providence, the Luz del Mundo, the yoga school from Buenos Aires and the Unification Church, always take part. The American Institute in Taiwan (AIT) plays a central role. Taiwan, an island off the coast of China that is disputed by China, is not legally

recognised by most countries in the international community and is not represented in the UN in accordance with Resolution 2758 of 1971, which was also signed by the USA and European countries.

This makes it a useful free harbour for conducting political and media campaigns that would be embarrassing in the US. This avoids potential diplomatic misunderstandings with Tokyo, which now holds diametrically opposed positions on the issue of new religious movements but is an important ally of the US. In practise, Taiwan has become what the island of Tortuga was to the pirates of the 17th century: a filibuster port that is not subject to the same rules as most other countries.

Figure 63 - 'Academia' reports that 15 March 2019 many articles by the author of this report were read from Taipei, Taiwan - Figure 61 - Who was in Taiwan on the days when the author's articles were read from Taipei?

Figure 27 bis - Introvigne in Taiwan in 2023 shows a photo of the author of this report

VI - The Libertarian Network

The Theory of Religious Economy

Rodney Stark is an American know-it-all scientist who vehemently advocates Darwinism in all fields except the one that is its own, biology (in his opinion, evolution is an invention to discredit religion).

This is how blogger Miguel Martinez sums up this character. An effective and keen synthesis that's enriched in the following lines:

Rodney Stark's main concern is to justify neoliberalism theologically, as is evident from the triumphant title of one of his books, *The Victory of Reason. How Christianity Led to Freedom, Capitalism, and Western Success*. A concept we might translate as, "If they foreclose on your house, it's because Jesus wanted it that way".

The author is witty and shows very well the conditions under which the "American know-it-all" works. However, to say that Stark merely "justifies neoliberalism theologically" falls short; in fact, his main concern is to justify theology on "neoliberal" grounds. We should proceed in order. We can say it better. Rodney Stark can be considered the founder of the **theory of religious economy**. This is the notion that the religious is a "market' equal in all respects to the commodity market. As in all markets, different consumers buy goods, which in this case are the "religious goods" (the various creeds) of competing religious enterprises (the more or less organized religions) [*La Vittoria della ragione: Come il cristianesimo ha prodotto libertà, progresso e ricchezza*; traduzione di Gabriella Tonoli, Torino, Lindau, 2006, Ed. It.]. Consistent with this paradigm, the theory states that.

[...] as in any other market for material or symbolic goods, and contrary to what some theorists of secularization think - also in (institutional) religion competition is good for the market and within certain limits supply feeds demand.

from Introvigne, M., *Mercato religioso, fondamentalismo e conservatorismo islamico: il caso della Turchia*, La Critica Sociologica, 152, 10 Febbraio 2005, pp. 43-56, p. 43

As evidence of this, authors working in the wake of this mercantilist conception point out that.

The countries with the greatest religious pluralism - that's, with the greatest competition among religious enterprises - such as the United States [...], are also the countries where the total number of religious practitioners remains stable or increases.

Whereas,

Where, on the other hand, the state obstructs religious pluralism and, in particular, opposes the entry into the market of new entities branded as "cults" or enemies of national identity, there - as in France and Russia - the number of religious practitioners generally declines spectacularly.

In other words, the conclusion is "more market and less state," according to the classic Lassiz-Faire paradigm. This position is based on two premises and an implicit assumption. The first presupposition is that the increase in the number of people practicing religions is a positive and desirable fact; the second presupposition is that the "consumer," the actor who makes his choice in the market of religions, is "rational" and knows what he's buying, in short, that this person is the 'homo oeconomicus' imagined by neoclassical economics, who tends to maximize his own utility; the implicit assumption of

the theory is that the various religious "firms" compete with each other and try to satisfy the buyers they compete for better than the others.

The consequences are manifold. If the basic assumptions are accepted, it follows that there's a need for strong "deregulation" of the religious market. Stark and Iannaccone write:

To the extent that a religious economy is competitive and pluralistic, overall levels of religious participation will tend to be high. On the contrary, to the extent that the religious economy is monopolized by one or two state-supported enterprises, participation tends to be low.

from Stark, R., Iannaccone, L.R., *A Supply-Side Reinterpretation of the "Secularization" of Europe, Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 33, No. 3, pp. 230-252, Settembre 1994, p. 233

In short, it appears that the enemy of the religious market, as with any other market, is the state; for it's natural for state institutions to favor monopolies to the detriment of free competition and to brand new potential competitors as "sects" or destructive cults. **The attraction that the Theory of Religious Economy has for some cult apologists is obviously due to this ideological notion, which relabels criticism of abusive cults as an attempt to suppress the free market in favor of monopolistic religions protected by a planning state that seeks to protect them from competition**. The implication, then, is that anti-cult activism is interested work carried out by people who are somehow connected to the state and/or the religious apparatus. In other words, a **conspiratorial idea**. Of course, only the large organized religions can claim a monopoly, certainly not the secular states of the West, whose founding value is precisely secularism. Nevertheless, the anti-cult movement has no relation to institutional religions, to the point of being accused of "secularism"...

The profane reader of religious economics, however, is still unsatisfied with the curiosity of how the various religions can compete with each other to satisfy customers better than their competitors. The answer is simple: the religions that satisfy customers the most are the most demanding and restrictive. One of the proponents of this mercantile view is Massimo Introvigne, president of CESNUR, the best example of what I call the *differentialist apologists*. He places great emphasis on this aspect of competitors improving the quality of the offer. He writes, for example:

[...] *there is a kind of Darwinian struggle even in the religious field. The most demanding religious proposals tend to prevail: among Jews, the Orthodox, in Islam the fundamentalists, and among Catholics, the most strict movements and congregations*.

from Beretta, R., *Contrordine: non siamo più atei. Intervista con Massimo Introvigne*, Avvenire, 8 Ottobre 2003

Competition would select the faiths that are more rigid and strict in demanding adherence, in short, the more integralist and fundamentalist versions. Competition, then, selects the fundamentalisms. This selection of extremist versions can be explained by the phenomenon of 'free riders' who literally 'travel cheap.' Those who want to enjoy the benefits of a collective enterprise, but don't want to bear the costs, travel without a ticket. In the religious realm, the collective enterprise is a church or faith community. An organization can tolerate a few free riders, i.e., uncommitted members, but not too many. Introvigne writes:

In the realm of religions, the less strict and rigorous organizations, which charge low admission fees and unobtrusively check that members have paid

their admission ticket, i.e., that they're sufficiently committed, take on board such a high number of free riders that they offer their faithful a diluted and unsatisfying religious experience, [...] The more rigorous organizations charge a more expensive admission ticket and check that everyone pays for it: In this way, they allow fewer free riders, and the symbolic goods of a group where there are no free riders are usually perceived as more satisfying by consumers.

from Introvigne, M., *Mercato religioso, fondamentalismo e conservatorismo islamico: il caso della Turchia, La Critica Sociologica*, n. 152, inverno 2004-2005 [10 febbraio 2005)], pp. 43-56, p. 43

One concludes that the outcome of this beneficial competition between religions is an increase in religious zeal and commitment, i.e., an increase in what is most hostile to competition (in this case, other commitments and zeal). This competition feeds the monopolistic claims of fundamentalisms, which are by definition incompatible. A free market that generates hostility to the free market! This is an incompatibility that cannot be reconciled and cannot harmonize in an ecumenism precisely because of the rigidity chosen by the market.

In conclusion, any representative of a conservative spiritual vision who wanted to strengthen it would have to work to ensure the continued existence of all other faiths on the market and to defend even the most controversial spiritual groups (e.g. Scientology) with all their might. This would have the double effect of strengthening their own incontrovertible "truth" and at the same time - paradoxically - becoming a defender of religious freedom.

Defending the indefensible: the crypto-paleolibertarianism of apologists

This free market, with its less than liberal results, is very reminiscent of the "paleolibertarian" strain of a doctrine known as anarcho-capitalism. Anarcho-capitalism or libertarianism is one of the directions of contemporary political and legal philosophy that proposes the abolition of the state and replaces it with market relations. The main intellectual reference for anarcho-capitalism is the economist Murray Rothbard, who in the 1960s proposed a political theory that focused on the inviolable sovereignty of the individual. Based on the non-aggression axiom, an ethical principle of natural law that states that it's not legitimate to attack the person and property of an individual, all forms of taxation that constitute a theft of individual property and all coercive measures by the state, which is seen as inherently authoritarian, should be abolished. In this society, every service would be provided by private individuals on a voluntary basis. A less extreme version is called mini-archism, and its proponents want to maintain a "minimal state" whose only function is to legitimize the protection of individuals from aggression, theft, breach of contract, and fraud. Both versions agree on the central idea that the state would not be authorized to use its monopoly to interfere with free transactions between individuals. Every transaction between individuals is a "market" transaction, even those that cannot be monetized in a concrete sense, such as the choice of friends or partners, because they are based on incentives and disincentives, on costs and benefits. Freedom and economic prosperity can therefore only be guaranteed by universal laissez-faire, in the economy as in any other sphere. The state, even minimalist mini-archism, therefore has no right to interfere in individual choices such as sexual orientation, drug use, lifestyle, and religious affiliation.

When using European political categories, American libertarianism is usually considered "right-wing" in economic terms and "left-wing" in rights terms, because of its radical advocacy of individual liberties. However, many of those

who held this view were culturally conservative and considered total freedom in the area of personal choices to be libertine excess. Therefore, in 1990, an article by **Lew Rockwell (***The Case for Paleo-libertarianism*, Liberty, January 1990, 34-38) gave rise to a conservative current called "**paleolibertarianism"** which traces its origins to the old American paleoconservative right of **Ludwig von Mises** and **Albert J. Nock**. What distinguishes it from classical anarcho-capitalism, especially in its "left-wing" version, is the strong defense of traditional values and customs, especially those associated with Christian morality. This creates a correspondence with the European criteria of the "right", since paleolibertarianism combines economic conservatism and cultural conservatism. This current is historically associated with the **Von Mises Institute**, an academic organization that sponsors hundreds of conferences and meetings to combat etatism and promote conservative moral values. Von Mises, the Austrian economist to whom the institute is dedicated, based his 'praxeology' (the science of human action) on the assumption that "human action is always rational."

The results of this logic may astound the prophane of market libertarianism. In a classic of anarcho-capitalist thought entitled *Defending the Indefensible*, **Walter Block** goes so far as to exonerate and justify behavior deemed reprehensible on the basis of the individual's free and consensual choice. "The 'blackmailer,' the 'filthy male chauvinist,' the 'employer of minors,' the 'garbage distributor,' the 'loan shark,' the 'homeless man,' the 'corrupt policeman,' even the 'person who yells 'fire' in a crowded club,' and other unsympathetic figures are defended on the basis of the principle of non-aggression. To give an example of the otherwise brilliant argumentative style that characterizes this provocative book, this excerpt from the speech in favor of the blackmailer is worthwhile:

What exactly is blackmail? Blackmail is the offer of trade. It is the offer to trade something, usually silence, for some other good, usually money. If the offer of the trade is accepted, the blackmailer then maintains his silence and the blackmailed pays the agreed-upon price. If the blackmail offer is rejected, the blackmailer may exercise his rights of free speech and publicize the secret. There is nothing amiss here. All that is happening is that an offer to maintain silence is being made. If the offer is rejected, the blackmailer does no more than exercise his right of free speech.The sole difference between a gossip and a blackmailer is that the blackmailer will refrain from speaking — for a price.

Among the 28 figures that benefit from Block's defense, the one of "guru" or "leader of a coercive group" is missing, but it can be argued with reasonable certainty that the arguments used would be based on the non-aggression principle and on free intercourse between individuals. Moreover, it is the same defense that Block voices with respect to the "capitalist pig exploiter of labor." These arguments overlap with those of cult apologists of all kinds, who are generally also extremely pro-free market. Suffice it to look at the **Acton Institute**, an American think tank with a Christian and ultra-lassez-faire matrix founded by

Figure 64 - Press reports of naked slave auction held by Robert Sirico

Robert Sirico and **Amway**. Sirico is a Catholic priest with a background as an evangelical Pentecostal pastor and founder of the Metropolitan Community

Church, a church that advocates for the rights of homosexual believers. At the age of 19, he joined the 'Jesus People Army', founded by Linda Meissner, which later merged into the '**Children of God**'. The Jesus People Army, like the Children of God, emerged in the context of the hippie Christian revival movement, which grew out of the counterculture and mysticism of the 1960s. In 1976, Sirico was arrested after a police raid on a Hollywood club equipped with rooms with leather ropes and iron chains where an auction of young nude male slaves was taking place. Charges against Sirico, who was the organizer of the event and the financial beneficiary of the auction, were dropped because it turned out that the slaves were all consenting adults who were members of a sadomasochistic organization called the 'Leather Fraternity'. Sirico joined the libertarian ideology in 1977 and became a spokesman for 'Libertarians for Gay Rights'. He later converted to Catholicism and paleolibertarianism. He was subsequently ordained to the priesthood. In 1990, he co- founded the Acton Institute with **Betsy DeVos**, from the family that owns **Amway**. The latter organization and others associated with it fund the **Acton Institute**, which, incidentally, is located in the same city as Amway, Grand Rapids, Michigan. Amway is a multinational **multi-level marketing** (MLM) company that sells various soaps and detergents and whose executives are evangelical activists closely associated with the American economic, political and military right who claim to speak directly to God. According to many scholars, MLM organizations are themselves cults, though not religious ones, based on the **Ponzi scheme**.

This multinational Ponzi scheme, in turn, is part of a vast network of Christian free-market organizations called the **Atlas Network**, controlled by the **Atlas Institute**. The organisation has been described as a “self-replicating think tank that creates think tanks”. Major US think tanks that belong to the network include the **Cato Institute**, the **Heartland Institute** (which is dedicated to refuting climate change), the **Heritage Foundation** (which is particularly

opposed to abortion and LGBT rights) and the American Legislative Exchange Council.

Figure 65- Relationships of the DeVos family to foundations and organisations of the American Christian and right-wing pro-free market wing

The connections and sometimes the overlaps between the characters and institutions of the various environments considered here, i.e., the conservative Christian environment, that of promoting aggressive economic laissez-faire, and that of the cults, are consistent, even if little known. The whole world of Christian fundamentalists and enemies of sexual freedoms and self-determination is strangely interested in the defence of cults that are furthest removed from Christian orthodoxy. To give an example, the Conservative Summit 2024 held in Bratislava, Slovakia, featured OndřejDostàl among the speakers. He is a Czech politician who sympathizes with the **Creative Society**, a project of the **AllatRa** cult. Another speaker was Mrs. Konecna, a communist politician. Both are quite openly pro-Russian. **Ján Figeľ** is a Slovakian politician with links to **CitizenGo**, a Spanish fundamentalist association, which is particularly committed to the defence of religious freedom and is close to both Scientology and the Unification Church. He is a key figure of Agenda Europe, an informal network of associations that came together in January 2013 with the aim of building a Christian-inspired European think tank and supporting the "pro-life" movement in Europe. This was reported by the EPF in a report summarising documents from this network, which were kept secret until 2017 and published following a leak from a still anonymous source.

Figure 66 - Ján Figeľ was the moderator of a public event on how to achieve peace between Russia and Ukraine organised by AllatRa. Below left is the logo and name of the Universal Peace Federation (Unification Church)

The Russian hand

In 2022, Figel' participated in the symposium "Religious Freedom: A Human Right Under Attack," co-organized by Figeľ's 'Tunega, Púčik and Tesár Foundation' with the Universal Peace federation (Unification Church). **Aaron Rhodes** (Forum for Religious Freedom-Europe) was among the speakers. Aaron Rhodes served as Executive Director of the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights (IHF) that is said to be infiltrated by Scientology. Rhodes is also a member of the **Common Sense Society**, an organisation full of pro-Russians.

This is interesting, because even if TFP has opted for the Atlanticist camp, the Polish organisation that refers to TFP, **Ordo Iuris**, obviously has ties to Russian circles, and conservative christians like Figel do not disdain working with Kremlin-affiliated figures. In 2017, Figel was at a conference of the All Faith Network (i.e. Scientology) with prominent Scientologist Eric Roux, pro-Western Introvigne and **Leonid Sebastianov**, a Russian ultranationalist, leader

of the "Old Believers" and representative of the Kremlin's informal diplomacy. That was before the war, of course. Those were years in which the director of CESNUR could write things like the following:

That Russia behaves well towards the LGBT lobby and fundamentalist Islam does not justify its aggressive and expansionist policies in the West, and at the same time, condemning these expansionist policies does not diminish appreciation for the fight against the gay lobby and fundamentalist Islam that Russia is waging.

A strange statement for an advocate of civil rights and ecumenism, but one that can be summarised in the idea that the Federation's domestic policy was good, but its foreign policy was not.

Figure 67 - Leonid Sebastianov, Ján Figeľ, Eric Roux, Massimo Introvigne at a All Faith Network conference in 2017

As in esotericism, what appears on the surface does not always correspond to the deep truth, which remains hidden to most people. The links between the Russian world and the world of cult apologists may be closer than we think, despite the pro-Atlanticism proclaimed on the surface. There are documented **links between Russian and American actors through the** World Congress of Families (WCF), an international platform founded in the 1990s to promote a conservative and "pro-family" vision of society, but which has evolved over time into a transnational hub for **the convergence of religious, political, and geopolitical interests between conservative elites in Russia and the United States**. Through the WCF and associated networks (e.g. **CitizenGo, Agenda**

Europe, etc.), Russian-American coalitions have been formed to boycott UN organizations that advocate for sexual and reproductive rights, influence local laws (including in Europe and Latin America), and promote conservative political leaders. The main financier of the WCF is the Russian oligarch **Konstantin Malofeev**. The WCF is an important instrument for the "soft alignment" between the religious and political elites of Russia and the USA. This rapprochement is less diplomatic than ideological, but has concrete political effects in numerous countries, including Eastern Europe, Latin America and Africa.

The connection between these two worlds, that of defending religious freedom and that of lobbies for life and the traditional family, is not a hypothesis but a declaration of intent clearly expressed at the WCF-International Religious Freedom Summit in 2021:

The IRF Roundtable and WCF share common values: the centrality of religious freedom and the natural family.

Figure 70 shows a map of the relationships between the apologetic network of cults and pro-life movements connected to the Russian world (The file in SVP format is easier to read and can be viewed here).

Ján Figeľ holds a prominent position within the **Clementy Schuman Legacy Foundation**, where he serves as **Chairman of the Scientific Committee**. His collaboration with the foundation—also documented by Catholic sources such as **ACI Stampa** and the **National Catholic Register**—fits into a broader framework of **Vatican diplomacy and interreligious dialogue** promoted by the Clementy network.

The **Clementy Group**, founded in London in 2020 by Belgian entrepreneur Pierre Michel Louvrier, is formally a **multi-family office and private equity fund** specializing in corporate acquisitions and restructuring in Europe and

the United States, as in the case of the Italian company **Fimer S.p.A.** However, Louvrier's **ties to Russia** have drawn attention and concern in intelligence circles and the financial press. He lived and worked for years between Moscow and Geneva, collaborating with **KPMG Russia** and serving on the boards of Russian companies such as **ASC Holding** (luxury automotive) and **Rusgrain Holding** (agribusiness).

According to various reports—including a European investigation into **Russian influence in Bulgaria**—in 2015 Louvrier was involved in the controversial **LIC33 project**, related to the symbolic one-euro acquisition of strategic Bulgarian companies, where he was considered "close" to the **Orthodox oligarch Konstantin Malofeev**, sanctioned by the European Union for supporting the Donbass separatists. Although Louvrier has claimed to have **ceased all investments in Russia** after the 2014–2015 sanctions and to have **transferred his financial activities to the West**, this background continues to weigh on the group's reputation.

An Intelligence Online investigation (February 2025) reports that **U.S. lawmakers and agencies** are monitoring Louvrier's network—which also includes the **Clementy Schuman Legacy Foundation**, engaged in Vatican diplomacy projects and inspired by the **pro-European legacy of Robert Schuman**—due to his past connections with **Russian-Orthodox networks** and **Kremlin-linked capital flows**. Officially, Clementy is **not currently involved** in any Russian operations or partnerships and **does not appear on any sanctions lists**; however, the Russian background of its founder and his relational ties ensure that the group remains **under scrutiny** for potential intersections between **Russian-origin capital**, **ecclesiastical networks**, and **European economic diplomacy**.

Wikipedia states that:

"To fully realize its mission, the foundation has established a collaboration with the **Pontifical Academy of Sciences**, supporting its activities and programs."

It is the same **P**ontifical Academy that hosted **Pastor Mark Burns**, *spiritual advisor to Donald Trump* and a key promoter of the **pro-Russian cult Allatra**, at the **10th World Changers Summit in 2025**.

In early 2025, **Tulsi Gabbard**, appointed by **Donald Trump** as head of U.S. intelligence, was questioned about her relationship with **Pierre Louvrier**, after *The New York Times* revealed that in 2024 she had attended a **Vatican event funded by Louvrier's foundation**

Anyway, in 2023, **Ján Figeľ** (who, as we have said, is linked to CitizenGo, Agenda Europa, Clementy Group and supports AllatRa), together with **Willy Fautré** (HRWF), **Massimo Introvigne** (CESNUR) and **Aaron Rhodes** (Forum for Religious Freedom-Europe), signed a letter to Japanese Prime Minister Kishida in defence of the Unification Church. A month earlier, together with Massimo Introvigne, he had already spoken out in favour of this issue at the International Summit for Religious Freedom (as stated on the church's own website).

Figure 68 - Some of the participants at the Conservative Meeting 2024 in Bratislava, Slovakia

The Citizens Commission for Human Rights (CCHR), a well-known Scientology front organisation, funded Paul Weyrich's **American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC)**, according to a letter from CCHR board member Carol Steinke.

A branch of Paul Weyrich's **American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC)** also honoured the wife of Sun Myung Moon, the leader of the **Unification Church**, Hak Ja Han Moon. The award was presented by Robin Brunelli, president of the **National Foundation for Women Legislators** and wife of Sam Brunelli, ALEC

director and long-time CNP member. In an AFN radio interview by Kelleigh Nelson with Chey Simonton, the far-reaching connections between the Council for National Policy (CNP) and the Reverend Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church were discussed at length.

As we have seen in (Fascists, spies and gurus. 5. Attack on secularism), Moon's Unification Church helped the Reagan administration fund the Nicaraguan Contras as part of the secret plan for which former **USCIRF** Chairman Abrams was convicted.

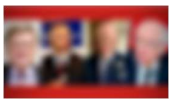

Figure 69 - The signatories of the letters in defense of the Unification Church (Willy Fautré, Ján Figeľ, Massimo Introvigne, Aaron Rhodes) as they appear in the CESNUR magazine Bitter Winter

Financial documents show that in 2019, roughly half of the total income of Fautré's **HRWF** came from a single source: the Alfred Vogel Foundation. This is clearly stated in HRWF's own 2019 financial report. This Swiss foundation has among its purposes the support of institutions consistent with the "Christian philosophy" of its founder, Alfred Vogel, a well-known member of the Jehovah's Witnesses. The result is that an organization presenting itself as independent from any creed or political movement is, in fact, heavily funded by an entity tied to a specific religious community.

The practical effect was not long in coming: during that very period, HRWF stepped up its publication of articles and reports openly favorable to Jehovah's Witnesses (here, here, here, here).

This detail clearly shows how the field of so-called "human rights and religious freedom advocacy" intersects with specific confessional interests, turning apparently neutral NGOs into instruments of sectarian lobbying.

In 2025, immediately after Donald Trump took office as President of the United States, the annual **International Religious Freedom (IRF) Summit** was held in Washington. Partners in the event included the Universal Peace Federation (i.e. the Unificatiion Church) and Scientology. In the plenary session, Vice President Vance declared the new administration's commitment to securing and strengthening the United States' efforts to protect religious freedom. The programme also included a (sponsored...) meeting with Pastor **Paula White**, Special Advisor to President Trump, **Marco Respinti** (CESNUR and Bitter Winter), **Patricia Duval** (FOB and more), Senator **Sam Browmback** (former Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom and member of Americans for Prosperity of **Atlas Network)**, **Micahel Jenkins** and **Tomihiro Tanaka**, both of the **Unification Church**. The chairman was the editor of the Washington Times, the Moonies' newspaper. The topic was the persecution of the Unification Church by the (democratic) government of Japan. The Southern Poverty Law Center had warned that the IRF summit would bring together far-right groups.

Figure 70 - A map of the connections between the cult apologist network and the Pro Life organizations

With the re-election of Donald Trump and the establishment of a White House Office of Faith aimed at defending Christians from prejudice and ‘empowering faith-based entities’,
the presence of Scientology in key positions appears to be increasing. For example, one of the church's major financial backers has been appointed to the board of the Kennedy Centre and a high-ranking Scientologist has been chosen to be among the peace negotiators between Russia and the Ukraine. Scientologist Grant Cardone — who spoke at Trump’s rally at Madison Square

Garden in October 2024 — was also given a speaking slot at Turning Point USA's annual Americafest event.

Actress and former Scientology devotee **Leah Remini** has been warning for years about Trump's closeness to Scientology.

Figure 71 - A sponsored dinner at IRF Summit 2025

It is worth noting that a group identified by numerous observers — including the Ukrainian security services — as pro-Russian and linked to Kremlin intelligence, **AllatRa**, now appears to be curiously at ease within U.S. institutions and at public events organized by conservative sectors of the U.S. administration. This is evidenced by the participation of its representatives in the **National Prayer Breakfast** at Congress, the "Uniting to Prevent Human Trafficking & Bring Hope to Survivors" meeting at the Rayburn House Office Building, and the **Faith and Freedom Coalition Conference**, which brings together leading lawmakers of the Christian right.

One of the most interesting aspects is that Donald Trump's spiritual advisor, **Pastor Mark Burns**, has become the **public face and main sponsor of AllatRa**. Burns took part in the **International Interfaith Conference** organized by AllatRa at **Capitol Hill**, and, together with AllatRa representatives, attended the **10th World Changers Summit** held at the **Pontifical Academy of Sciences in the Vatican**.

Fig. 72 – Mark Burns attends the International Interfaith Conference organized by AllatRa

In **October 2025**, **Mark Burns** and the **ultra-Atlanticist Massimo Introvigne** met in **South Korea** to take part in a rally in support of the **widow of Reverend Moon** of the **Unification Church**, who had been imprisoned for **fraud and corruption** (officially presented, of course, as *religious persecution*). It seems that the **director of CESNUR** did not take the opportunity to **warn Burns about who his Russophone friends really are**.

Fig. 73 – Burns and Introvigne in South Korea (from *Bitter Winter*)

Another noteworthy element is what appears to be a strategic alliance between this pro-Russian group and **Falun Gong**, the Chinese movement that financed Donald Trump's 2016 election campaign. In fact, prominent figures within AllatRa have begun an aggressive campaign of propaganda in favor of this movement.

Follow the money

From 2008 to 2020, the major Christian conservative associations in the United States spent more than $280 million abroad. At least 90 million of that went to Europe, while the rest went to Africa and Asia. This is according to an analysis by the US investigative website OpenDemocracy, in which authors Claire Provost and Nandini Archer analysed thousands of financial records from 28 mostly Christian extremist and ultra-pro-free market US groups with strong links to the conservative, sometimes far right.

In recent years, thanks in part to these investments, these groups have become increasingly influential in American and international politics. Indeed, the funds have the explicit purpose of supporting both initiatives and other satellite organisations around the world, which in turn work to influence public opinion, laws and national policies to prevent the enforcement of sexual and reproductive rights. But that is not all. Among the aims of all these organisations, the protection of "**religious freedom**" is of great importance

The list of 28 groups under consideration includes the **Acton Institute**, the **Alliance Defending Freedom**, the **Family Research Council**, the **Federalist Society**, the **American Center for Law and Justice**, the **Heritage Foundation**, the **Cato Institute** and the American Society for the Defense of Tradition, Family and Property. The latter is nothing other than the American branch of the Brazilian organisation for the defence of Tradition, Family and Property (TFP), which was founded by Plinio Correa de Oliveira and to which the Italian traditionalist Catholic associations Alleanza Cattolica and Fondazione Lepanto refer, as we have seen (see Fascists, spies and gurus. 4. The black network). From the first part of this report, we know that the main objective of this organisation since the mid-1980s has been to defend religious freedom and thus promote an anti-secular vision of society. It is therefore likely that the funds of this society - 3,123,131 dollars between 2008 and 2020 - will flow to European organisations pursuing the same goal. In Italy, the most important organisation of this kind is the **Centro Studi Nuove Religioni (CESNUR)**, which has emerged from a rib of Alleanza Cattolica, with which it has long shared a top figure. On the other hand, De Mattei, the head of the Lepanto Foundation, is a member of the expert panel of the Heritage Foundation and the Acton Institute, both of which are included in the list analysed by Open Democracy. This flow of money to Europe is driven primarily by two groups that focus their battles on the courts. One is the organisation American Center for Law and Justice (ACLJ), led by Trump's personal lawyer Jay Sekulow, and Alliance

Defending Freedom (ADF). The latter boasts **Betsy DeVos**'s family among its founders. Both groups are part of Agenda Europe

The cult apologist mafia (Part III)

- Mar 2, 2025
- 45 min read

Part I Part II

VII - Cults and Soft Power

Religious polarisation

On 8 January 2023, thousands of supporters of former President Jair Bolsonaro raided the Congress building and also stormed the Federal Court in Brasilia to protest against the election of his rival Lula. In part a repeat of the storming of Capital Hill two years earlier by Donald Trump supporters. While in Washington many of the rioters were fundamentalist Christians and many also adherents of the **QAnon** conspiracy theory who flaunted their affiliation on T-shirts and signs, in Brasilia most of the participants in the storming were evangelical Pentecostals who gathered and prayed amid the devastation. Some turned their rosaries towards the police riot squad. This shows how important religion is when it comes to determining the moves of the masses on the geopolitical chessboard.

Brian Kaylor
@BrianKaylor
As political violence hits #Brazil, important to remember #Bolsonaro played to evangelicals much like #Trump. Look for religion in this coup effort, like in this photo of Bolsonaro supporters kneeling to pray as they storm presidential palace. (Eraldo Peres/AP)
Traduci il Tweet

Figure 74 - The post by Brian Kaylor, a Baptist pastor, pointing out the role of religion in the attempted coup in Brazil in 2023

Religious soft power

The term **soft power** was coined in the 1990s by Joseph S. Nye, Jr. from the Harvard Kennedy School of Government. Nye sees it as a form of exercising power that represents an alternative to the use of military force and aims to influence public opinion, primarily through mass culture and the media. Such operations are a low-intensity but effective strategy for influencing public

opinion. This is a strategy of hybrid warfare. The use of religion as a tool of influence has a long history.

The **CIA**'s first religious tool was Catholicism, which "became **the model through which intelligence agencies could understand and manipulate other world religions**" (Michael Graziano coined the phrase). Under the guise of the Church's profound power of persuasion, the OSS, the CIA predecessor, mobilised the European population against its Nazi (and later Soviet) occupiers. In fact, Allen Dalles, who headed the CIA in its early years, had used the Catholic Church as a cover for intelligence operations when he was in charge of the Office for Strategic Services (OSS), the CIA's predecessor organisation. In his book 'Errand into the Wilderness of Mirrors', Michael Graziano, recalling the Office of Strategic Services of the Second World War, writes that 'American analysts often assumed that Catholic interests - and especially those of the Vatican - were perfectly aligned with the goals of the United States'. Through the Belgian priest Felix Morlion, the agency also co-operated with the Catholic international press in what became known as 'Operation Pilgrim's Progress'.

When the agency encountered other world religions during the Cold War – Shintoism in Japan, Buddhism in Southeast Asia, and especially Islam in Iran – it took it for granted that "**the United States and world religions were [natural allies]**" in the fight against atheistic communism. After the war ended, former OSS agents joined the newly formed Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), bringing with them the experience and networks necessary to turn religion into an operational tool for clandestine activities.

In the early years of the Cold War, James Angleton organised an elaborate spy network that enabled the CIA to obtain the intelligence reports sent to the Vatican by the papal nuncios stationed behind the Iron Curtain and in other "closed" areas. At the time, this was one of the few means available to the CIA to penetrate the Eastern Bloc.

CIA officials such as Allen Dulles, Kermit Roosevelt, Miles Copeland, William Eddy and James Jesus Angleton did not hesitate to use religion as a transactional tool. American clergymen, missionaries and the evangelist **Billy Graham** worked secretly with the CIA. In 1975, a US Senate report revealed that various American priests and missionaries were being used to gather information in various countries.

As Matthew Avery Sutton points out in *Religion and Politics Beyond the Culture Wars: New Directions in a Divided America*, in the early 1950s, in Guatemala, the popular and charismatic president **Jacobo Árbenz** began a campaign of land reform, transferring thousands of acres of unused property from the hands of U.S. corporations to local peasants. His actions directly threatened the **United Fruit Company**, one of the most powerful and influential U.S. corporations. The CIA then launched an extensive campaign against Árbenz, linking him to communism and the Soviet Union. To that end, the CIA appears to have recruited **Cardinal Francis Spellman** to travel to Guatemala and encourage local prelates to issue a pastoral letter denouncing communism (and, indirectly, Árbenz). Perhaps the most ingenious move, however, was the invention of a fictitious anti-religious organization, the **"Organization of Militant Atheists."** The CIA fabricated a series of letters claiming to promote a communist revolution in Guatemala in order to advance atheism. The letters accused the Catholic Church of acting on behalf of the United States and the Vatican. These letters were "lost" and then discovered by journalists, religious leaders, and politicians opposed to Árbenz. In June 1954, a small "army" led by the rebel leader and U.S. puppet **Castillo Armas** invaded Guatemala. Árbenz fled the country.

In **Chile**, the CIA allegedly paid Belgian priest **Roger Vekemans** millions of dollars to build a Catholic anti-communist movement in Chile, which helped replace the leftist government of **Salvador Allende** with **Eduardo Frei Montalva** of the Christian Democratic Party.

The CIA also considered **Catholicism** a strategic tool in **Vietnam.** The best-known case involves **Tom Dooley**, a devout Catholic and physician, who, while working with Vietnamese refugees and founding hospitals in Laos, also provided the CIA with information on popular sentiment and North Vietnamese troop movements. **Edward Lansdale**, who led the early U.S. propaganda campaign in Southeast Asia, integrated religious elements – from fabricated horoscopes to messages warning that the Virgin Mary was heading south – into his strategies to encourage the Vietnamese to resist communism.

The primacy of Catholicism, so great that the CIA was nicknamed the "Catholic Intelligence Agency", has waned over time. In Latin America, the Catholic continent par excellence, the Roman Church is increasingly losing ground to the various evangelical denominations. One reason for this is the fact that the position of the more conservative Evangelicals was **directly supported during the Cold War by the United States**, which saw the religious group as a useful bulwark against communism in Latin America, an area where liberation theology had given Catholicism a dangerous flavour.

The Rockefeller Report of 1969 and the **Santa Fe Declaration** of 1980 illustrate the use of religion by North American intelligence in defence of American interests in South America.

The **Rockefeller Report** states that the US must strive to win the battle for the hegemony of consciousness by exposing Latin America to the influence of the American way of life "**through the control of the traditional socializing apparatuses of civil society: family, school and church**".

The **Santa Fe document**, prepared for the Council on Inter-American Security and presented to the Republican Platform Committee in 1980 by a team of ultra-conservative advisors, states that "US foreign policy must begin to counter (and not react to) liberation theology as used in Latin America by

liberation theology clergy." The paper refers to the work already done in this direction:

The experience gained in Vietnam through programmed population control was exported by many A.I.D. agents and other U.S. services to Latin America, particularly Guatemala. Some cults were founded by psychological warfare specialists who had been entrusted with the control of political space and hegemony over consciences. (emphasis mine)

The Santa Fe document is clear and does not mince its words. Through the **National Security Agency (NSA)**, the United States is creating "cults" " that are able to "control t he political space and the hegemony of consciences". In charge are "specialists in psychological warfare."

Jesus Garzia Ruiz writes in a text entitled "La notion relative aux sectes en Am érique latine" that in Latin America " **all cults are work of the United States and are financed from abroad**."
A note from the **Mexican Ministry of the Interior** states that

Sects carry out the most subtle part of the process of domination and North Americanisation of underdeveloped societies by using religious preaching, which is part of the ideological struggle, within civil society.

To support this policy, the **Institute for Religion and Democracy (IRD)**, an interfaith organisation, was established in 1981 and funded by right-wing institutions, including the Smith Richardson and the Mellon Scaife Family Foundation. Both served as financial conduits for the **CIA**. The IRD unleashed a propaganda campaign against church activists who were at the forefront of

opposing US aid to the government of El Salvador and other repressive regimes in Latin America.

The project was successful. Today, the influence of evangelicals on society in these countries is enormous in terms of electoral potential. The expansion of evangelical churches in Latin America, especially the neo-Pentecostal churches, which have considerable fundings that make them more "competitive" with the Catholic Church, has contributed to the rise of "right-wing" personalities and political forces close to the interests of the economic-financial powers, especially the American ones. Behind these phenomena there seems to be a very specific strategy, which consists of replacing "left-wing Catholic" Christians (because they are interested in social issues) with "right-wing evangelical" Christians (who are very interested in moral issues, but little in social issues).

The use of the Mormons seems to have been remarkable, as Alain Gillette points out in his book "Les mormons. De la théocratie à Internet". In the early 1980s, the Nicaraguan government accused the Mormons, Seventh-day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses of being involved in a CIA plot to overthrow the Sandinista government.

It has been proven that many Mormons in Finland have been involved with the CIA since the 1950s. In 1978, two journalists, Jorraa Lindfors and Jukka Rislakki, wrote a book about the CIA's alleged links to the Mormon Church. According to the authors, "many of the young missionaries in Finland had been trained as military officers, and the head of the Mormons' international missionary work, Apostle Neal A. Maxwell, was a former CIA agent".

There is ample evidence of US funding of all kinds of churches, Christian and non-Christian. For example, the CIA funded churches in Kerala, India, and this interference in Indian politics came to light in 1978 when the former ambassador to that country, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, published the information in his book "A Dangerous Place" In addition to the interference in Kerala, the American churches also supported the terrorists in Nagaland on a large scale. These terrorists received blatant help from the American establishment in the form of so-called **human rights reports** and public statements of support from high-ranking politicians like Jimmy Carter.

The CIA worked with agents of DINA, the Chilean secret police, to build a very sophisticated intelligence system in Chile that utilised the Pentecostal "Message" cult and the **Colonia Dignidad** facility, founded as a Nazi refugee colony and run by Pastor **Paul Shafer**, for covert operations. Paul Shafer, a former Nazi and security agent for Pastor **William Branham** in Germany, worked with the **DINA** (Chilean secret police) to interrogate, torture and murder opponents of the Pinochet regime.

Religion plays a very powerful role in culturally influencing and orienting the masses. Religions are an extraordinary *instrumentum regni* because they can dilute the religious identity of some population groups by creating new forms of mutual recognition (in-group) that become manoeuvrable constituencies when they are not useful for processes of social polarisation that can lead to uprisings or real revolutions. For example, Carl Gershman, director of the **National Endowment for Democracy (Ned)**, told the US Congress in 2018 that Ned had spent $3,381,824 on programmes prior to the 2014 popular uprising in Ukraine, which took place under the name "Euromaiden", including support for those non-governmental organisations that fuelled the uprising. The role of the various churches and cults in the Euromaiden affair was significant. Among them were the Greek Catholics. This does not mean that Euromaiden

was carried out by “sects” or “Satanists",” as has been claimed, but only that the religious element played a role in social polarisation.

This is not just an intuition or a theory based on circumstantial evidence, but is clearly expressed by various relevant actors. For example, **Sam Brownback**, former U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom, linked to the **Atlas Network** and active in the **IRF Roundtable** founded by Scientology, stated:

Religious freedom is a strategic asset of foreign policy, not merely a moral cause (from IRF Ministerial 2019)

The Politicization of Freedom of Religion or Belief: From the United States to Europe

Freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) is formally enshrined in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Conceived as a universal guarantee, in recent decades it has been progressively transformed into a tool of geopolitical influence and into a platform for political-religious lobbying, both in the United States and in Europe.

In the United States, the decisive turning point came with the **International Religious Freedom Act** of 1998, which institutionalized the international promotion of religious freedom through the creation of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom and the appointment of an Ambassador-at-Large within the State Department. The original intent was bipartisan: to place FoRB among universal, non-divisive human rights. Yet from the start, its application revealed marked selectivity. Strategic rivals such as China, Iran, or Russia were systematically sanctioned for violations of religious freedom,

while key partners of U.S. foreign policy such as Saudi Arabia or Egypt continued to receive substantial aid and military supplies despite ongoing repression of religious minorities. As scholars such as Eugenia Relaño Pastor (2005) and Jasper Vaughn (2022) have observed, FoRB soon became a diplomatic lever bent to the needs of realpolitik, especially in the context of the "war on terror."

In this framework, **evangelical lobbies** played a crucial role, pushing for a Christocentric interpretation of religious freedom and heavily influencing foreign policy choices. **Allen D. Hertzke**, in ***Freeing God's Children: The Unlikely Alliance for Global Human Rights*** (2004), reconstructs the genesis of the **International Religious Freedom Act** and shows how it emerged from an unexpected **convergence of conservative evangelicals, Catholics, and human rights activists, with a strong evangelical imprint**.

The Trump administration exacerbated this trend, elevating religious freedom above other rights and focusing almost exclusively on Christian persecution, while domestically advancing policies such as the Muslim ban. The late condemnation of the genocide of Uyghurs in China, which came only at the end of Trump's term, revealed the contradictions of an approach oscillating between rhetoric and geopolitical calculation. The Biden administration sought to correct course by appointing Rashad Hussein, the first Muslim Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom, and by including antisemitism and Islamophobia in its agenda. Yet contradictions remained, such as the controversial removal of Nigeria from the list of Countries of Particular Concern. In practice, U.S. FoRB policy has lost much of its international credibility, increasingly appearing as a right applied in selective and variable ways.

In Europe, the picture is different but no less problematic. Formally, FoRB is understood as part of an integrated human rights framework, without being placed at the top of a hierarchy of democratic values (Evans 2008). Yet politicization is evident in Brussels as well. The European Parliament

Intergroup on FoRB—founded in 2015 as a cross-party space—has, since 2019, been progressively dominated by figures of the radical right such as **Carlo Fidanza** (Fratelli d'Italia) and **Joachim Kuhs** (AfD). Under their leadership, the defense of religious freedom has been reduced almost exclusively to denunciations of Christian persecution and systematic demonization of Islam, with official statements warning of a "Christian genocide" while ignoring other persecuted minorities. An investigation by the French site *Blast* has shown how the intergroup has also become a lobbying platform, amplified by media such as *Bruxelles-Média* and *The European Times*, already criticized by the Belgian Press Ethics Council for lack of independence (and **linked to Scientology**). These outlets have provided visibility to controversial movements, from Scientology to the Church of Almighty God, which use the rhetoric of religious persecution to fend off accusations of sectarianism.

Figure 75 - Carlo Fidanza, leading figure of the FoRB Intergroup, giving the "Roman salute" at a neo-fascist rally (from the Fanpage report)

A key role has also been played by **sectarian lobbies** and **religious think tanks**. Scientology, for example, has used ***The European Times*** to present itself as a discriminated minority, while CESNUR, founded by Massimo Introvigne, has

provided academic legitimization to various contested movements. At the same time, ultraconservative NGOs such as Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF) International have consolidated the link between FoRB advocacy, pro-life campaigns, anti-LGBT mobilizations, and sovereigntist agendas, pushing the debate into increasingly polarized ideological coordinates.

In this context, a clear transatlantic convergence emerges. In the United States, FoRB has been bent by evangelical lobbies and used as a tool of selective foreign policy; in Europe, the radical right and sectarian movements have turned the FoRB intergroup into a closed club, where religious freedom functions more as an identity weapon than a universal right. In both cases, the result is the same: a fundamental right risks being delegitimized—not because it does not exist, but because its application appears distorted, opaque, and instrumental to partisan interests.

Restoring the universal dignity of freedom of religion or belief thus requires reintegrating it within the broader framework of human rights, overcoming double standards, and limiting the influence of ideological and sectarian lobbies. Only then can FoRB return to what international treaties envisioned: an inclusive and non-instrumental guarantee.

Two Chinese cults

In 2019, the television channel NBC revealed that Donald Trump's most important advertising supporter - after his election committee - was the newspaper **The Epoch Times**. This is a multilingual, far-right newspaper run by the Chinese religious movement **Falun Gong**. Much of the newspaper's efforts are dedicated to promoting the right in America, but also in Europe, a work that has included the dissemination of false data about alleged voter fraud in the 2020 US elections. The Epoch Times is also one of the main

disseminators of conspiracy theories. The most important is that of **QAnon**, the bizarre theory that sees Trump as the possible saviour of the world from the satanic-pedophile dome that secretly rules it.

In 2020, the New York Times called the paper a "disinformation machine of global scale." According to Media Matters for America, the main goal of the Epoch Times - which is now published in 36 countries under the supervision of a network of non-profit organisations - is not to make a profit, but to organise a long and extensive "**influence operation**" The aim of this influence operation, in turn, is to "foment anti-Chinese Communist Party sentiment". The cult is actually being persecuted in its own country.

It has been said that The Epoch Times was the main financier of Donald Trump's election campaign. However, it is not clear where Falun Gong's funding came from. **Steve Bannon**, the guru of Trump's New Right, has collaborated with Falun Gong in the production of a documentary for **New Tang Dinasty TV (NTD)**, a channel owned by the cult's holding company, and said that in conversations with these interlocutors he was under the impression that they had unlimited resources.

The conclusions frequently drawn over the years, not only during Trump's presidency, about a connection between the Chinese cult and the CIA in an anti-Chinese capacity are based on sporadically filtered and reported press reports. As early as 2010, the Washington Post reported $1.5 million in funding from the US State Department for the Global Internet Freedom consortium, which is based in the US but linked to the Falun Gong spiritual movement. More recently, in 2021, the US media reported on a State Department grant to a software development team owned by Falun Gong. Oddly enough, Steve Bannon himself is involved.

In June 2024, the finance director of Epoch Times, Weidong Guan, was arrested for alleged involvement in a multi-year money laundering scheme involving at least 67 million dollars in illegally acquired funds. According to the indictment, Guan allegedly used a cryptocurrency platform to purchase prepaid cards with illicit funds, including unemployment benefits, at a discount. Interestingly, following the arrest of the finance director, Falun Gong spiritual leader **Li Hongzhi** wrote two articles that appear to be aimed directly at the media company's leadership and were published prominently on the Epoch Times homepage:

You were thinking that it's hard to fight the CCP's persecution without funds, and wanted to make money for this cause; and that the U.S. government would be understanding if something wasn't handled quite right - Li wrote in an article published on 5 June -But that was your own thinking.

The Falun Gong leader, who apparently distances himself from the newspaper's leadership, which allegedly orchestrated the scam without his knowledge, describes the publication's mission (to fight the CCP's persecution of Falun Gong) and refers to the complacency that this leadership would have expected from the U.S. government in case the illicit operation became known.

On what premise should a money laundering activity conducted by a Chinese cult would have met with such complacency? So the New York District's investigation was embarrassing.

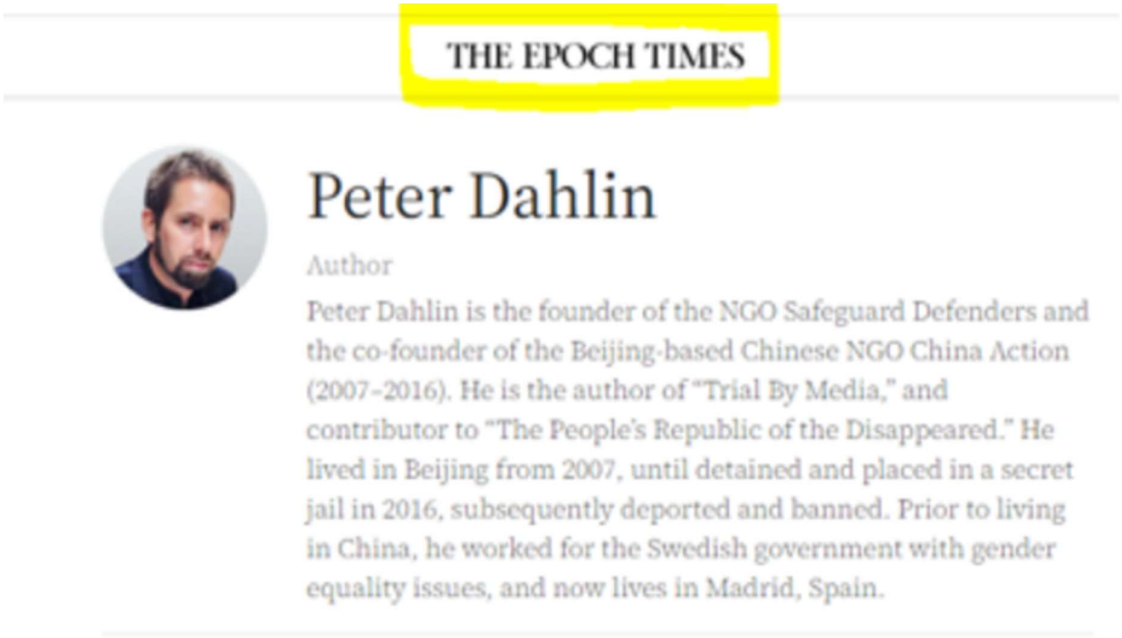
THE EPOCH TIMES
Peter Dahlin
Author
Peter Dahlin is the founder of the NGO Safeguard Defenders and the co-founder of the Beijing-based Chinese NGO China Action (2007–2016). He is the author of "Trial By Media," and contributor to "The People's Republic of the Disappeared." He lived in Beijing from 2007, until detained and placed in a secret jail in 2016, subsequently deported and banned. Prior to living in China, he worked for the Swedish government with gender equality issues, and now lives in Madrid, Spain.

Figure 76 - The tab dedicated to the founder of Safeguard Defenders on the Epoch Times website.

However, in order to understand how a work of influence takes place, I am reporting here on a fact that is small (but perhaps not even that small) but extremely significant from the point of view of international political relevance: In 2022, the main international, but mainly Italian and Canadian newspapers published an alarming news story about the proliferation of secret Chinese police stations scattered around the world, tasked with monitoring compatriots abroad. This alarm was based on a report by the Madrid-based non-governmental organisation Safeguard Defenders, whose leading figure is Peter Dahlin, who co-founded it with Michael Caster. A quick Google search was all it took to find out that Dahlin writes for the Epoch Times (Figure 76).

Does this mean that the issue of the Chinese police stations is a fake? We cannot say. It may very well be true as far as a person outside of this intelligence dynamic could know. However, it should be noted that national and supranational agencies and bodies are also acting on the basis of

information coming from organisations linked to a cult that has been described as **a disinformation machine on a global scale**.

However, another Chinese cult has come to the fore undermining Falun Gong. This is the **Church of Almighty God**, also known as *the Lightning of the East*, which is considered the most persecuted religious movement in the world. The financing of this cult, too, is also unknown. It must be much larger than that of Falun Gong, because this movement, which worships the reincarnation of Jesus Christ in a Chinese woman, is known for an intense artistic production that includes films, songs, ballets, musicals and various shows of dizzying quantity and outstanding quality.

It is unclear where the Church of Almighty God, a minority and persecuted cult, gets the **huge sums of money** needed to produce such a large amount of artistic material, produced with great professionalism (among other things, translated into almost every language in the world, in which it is dubbed with equal professionalism). This is **an immense commitment** from people such as directors, actors, scriptwriters, set designers, authors, dancers, choreographers, costume designers, singers, translators, dubbing actors, cameramen, editors, etc. The money required is enormous and the organisation complex: logistical difficulties, studios, rehearsal times that are incompatible with the daily work of a non-professional, etc.

Video 2 - One of the thousands of ballets and musicals produced by the Church of Almighty God

One of the stars of these films is Li Yanli, who staged a suicide attempt at Madrid airport on 3 November 2023 to avoid being deported to China.

Although she was a follower of a cult that was far from Catholicism, she was supported by a broad front of Catholic extremism that managed to collect over 60,000 signatures to present a petition to the judges to grant the actress political asylum. Part of this broad front was the association "**Abogados Cristianos**", an ultra-Catholic lobby closely linked to the far-right party **Vox**, but also to such fundamentalist lobbies as **CitizenGo**, **HazteOir** or **El Yunque**, of which HazteOir appears to be only a screen-organization.

In 2021, Wikileaks published "**The Intolerance Network**", " consisting of 17,000 documents revealing the relationships between CitizenGO, HazteOir, the far-right party Vox and the occult organisation **El Yunque**. The latter is a Mexican secret society organised as a paramilitary corps with the aim of restoring the Kingdom of Christ. Basically the same agenda as Tradition, Family and Property. It is therefore interesting to read what is written about the situation in Spain in the report "Modern-Day Crusaders in Europe", prepared for the European Parliamentary Forum on Sexual and Reproductive Rights:

[...] in 2003 a new organisation called **Hazte Oir** appeared which **seems to fit many of the characteristics often associated with TFP** (see section 5), including: grass-roots mobilisation combined with fundraising, multiplicity of branding, youth outreach, the same US contacts, intense contact with other TFP organisations and, finally, exercising traditionalist pressure on the Catholic Church. It diverges from TFP characteristics primarily in its branding, and, while Catholic-inspired, Hazte Oir is by no means a religious movement, and there are no references to Corrêa de Oliveira. Hazte Oir (literally, 'make yourself heard') plays a watchdog role on Spanish political life and launched a social mobilisation platform "**CitizenGo**" which would appear to be a 21st century digital version of the direct mailing techniques TFP pioneered in the 1970s (see section 8). **Hazte Oir may be the reincarnation of TFP-Covadonga** (name of the Spanish branch of TFP, ed.)

under a new set of circumstances where there are limits as to how openly it may display its affiliations in Spain26 (see section 6). Whether Hazte Oir is formally part of the TFP family or not, it shares many of the characteristics of TFP organisations and occupies the same niche. (Bold mine)

After all, representatives of another organisation that is closely linked to the TFP via **Alleanza Cattolica** (see the fourth part of this report), namely the Centre for the Study of New Religions (CESNUR), expressly apologise to CitizenGo and also describe it as a "meritorious organisation".

We know about the persecution to which the Church of Almighty God is subjected by the Chinese Communist Party mainly thanks to an Italian publication issued by the think tank CESNUR, which emerged from Alleanza Cattolica. It is called **Bitter Winter**. Not that the backers of Bitter Winter, a **daily** magazine in eight languages with news from China, a country from which it is not easy to export news, and which is published by a non-profit organisation based in Turin, CESNUR, are clear either. But the news about religious persecution in China used by the **US State Department** is that of the Turin-based magazine. The Department, whose documents represent the official US position and are supposed to guide US policy, openly admits in its report on religious freedom that much of the information comes from Bitter Winter. Its editor, Massimo Introvigne, rightly boasts of this and writes

Readers of Bitter Winter will forgive us if we mention that, in the section on China, Bitter Winter remains, as it was in the report of last year, the single most quoted source. We were quoted 74 times in 2020. The quotes became 85 in 2021.

It is evident that the sources accessed by the Catholic Lawyer's magazine are more reliable than those accessed by the US intelligence services.

In an exchange on Facebook between a member of the Italian “anti-cult” community and Introvigne, faced with the paradox that Bitter Winter could have more information than the American services, Introvigne commented with a short text containing the following statements: “I have known the people who produce these reports for decades" and “there are people in China, but not only there, who prefer to pass on information to scholars who do not work for American government agencies or those of other countries”. With this, the editor of CESNUR and Bitter Winter confirms both the direct and long-standing knowledge of the report writers and that **his magazine actually knows more than the CIA** because Chinese citizens are willing to talk to its editors rather than the agencies the magazine will later report to anyway. The post lasted the minutes it took the author to realise that it was inappropriate to leave it online and delete it. However, the screenshot was photographed before it was deleted (Fig. 77). A few days later, returning to the same topic on the same social network, the director of CESNUR had a new fit of unbridled self-congratulation, going so far as to boast that “a small magazine published in Turin has become **the main source of official documents on religion in China** from the most important country in the world” (Fig. 78).

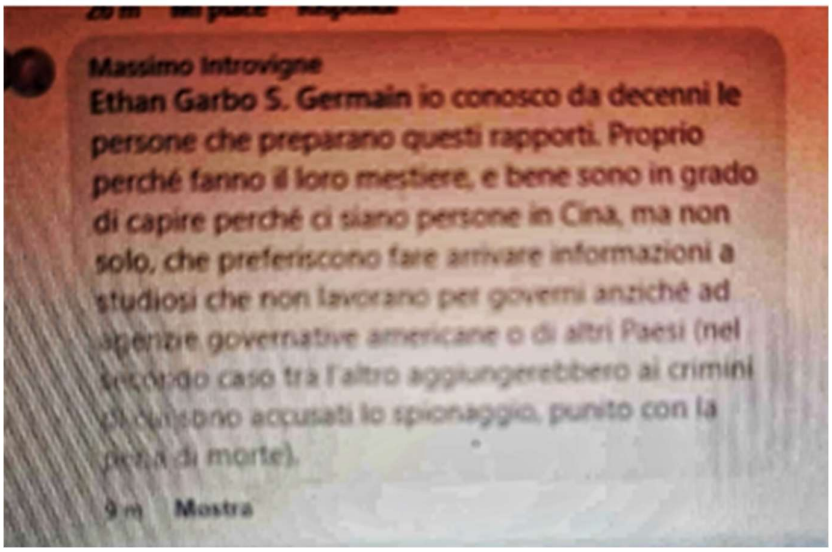
Massimo Introvigne
Ethan Garbo S. Germain io conosco da decenni le persone che preparano questi rapporti. Proprio perché fanno il loro mestiere, e bene sono in grado di capire perché ci siano persone in Cina, ma non solo, che preferiscono fare arrivare informazioni a studiosi che non lavorano per governi anziché ad agenzie governative americane o di altri Paesi (nel secondo caso tra l'altro aggiungerebbero ai crimini di cui sono accusati lo spionaggio, punito con la pena di morte).
9 m Mostra

Figure 77 - Introvigne writes that the Chinese talk to his magazine and not to government agencies

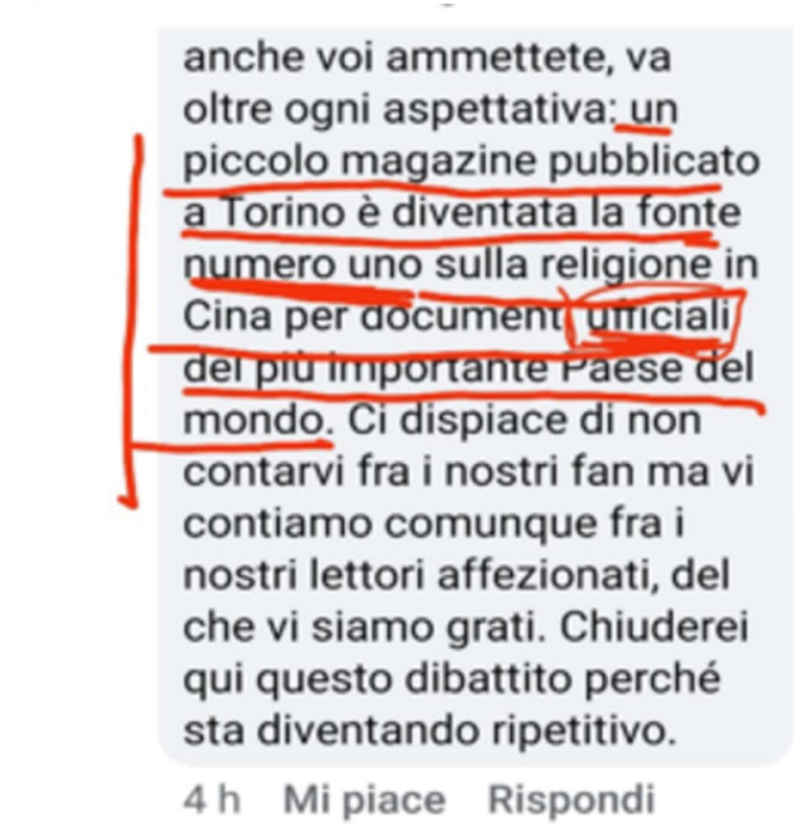
anche voi ammettete, va oltre ogni aspettativa: un piccolo magazine pubblicato a Torino è diventata la fonte numero uno sulla religione in Cina per document ufficiali del più importante Paese del mondo. Ci dispiace di non contarvi fra i nostri fan ma vi contiamo comunque fra i nostri lettori affezionati, del che vi siamo grati. Chiuderei qui questo dibattito perché sta diventando ripetitivo.
4 h Mi piace Rispondi

Figure 78 - Introvigne confirms that Bitter Winter is the most important source on religion in China for the USA.

It is therefore ironic that a magazine and an organisation capable of such intelligence capabilities should fall for a hoax such as the one perpetrated on it by a Ukrainian pseudo-scientist: **Oleg Maltslev**. This is the leader of an Odessa-based organization with whom CESNUR developed an instant affectionate relationship and for whom it gave in to an exculpatory impulse after this organization came under heavy criticism in 2014 from Russian and Ukrainian anti-cult associations.

According to a well-known script, the exchange of cordiality and appreciation then began between CESNUR and the leader of the group vilified by the evil anti-cultists, Maltslev. A monographic issue of CESNUR's magazine was dedicated to him in 2018. The monographic issue was preceded by an

exchange of courtesy visits in 2016. Malstlev had first been invited to the CESNUR headquarters in Turin, and then the CESNUR director had returned the favour with a visit to Odessa, where he gave a lecture to Maltslev's supporters on the blatantly discriminatory actions of the anti-cult movement. The CESNUR director reportedly called Meltslev “a scientist whose scientific research deserves much attention”; the Ukrainian instead referred to the Italian as a star of great magnitude that “shining in the sky of Odessa”.

In 2024, things took a turn for the worse: Ukrainian law enforcement and security services gathered evidence of psychological abuse, blackmail, threats and harassment against supporters and journalists after a lengthy investigation. Those who questioned Maltslev's authority, his titles (which were apparently all fake) and his merits were harshly persecuted on social networks, for example by spreading accusations of paedophilia accompanied by edited audio and video files. In addition, many people who were persecuted by Maltslev's organisations were bombarded with calls with threatening content from unknown numbers. One person died of a heart attack as a result. But that's nothing.

On 1 September, almost six months late, the Ukrainian press reported that on 5 March law enforcement officers had arrested the closest associate of the “guru'”, the editor-in-chief of the newspaper “Unsolved Crimes” (one of the organisation's productions) Konstantin Slobodyanyuk, and taken him to a pre-trial detention centre. The latter was accused of an impressive series of crimes. These include the payment of bribes to an official, criminal conspiracy and illegal burglary of computer equipment, but above all **high treason** under martial law (Part 2 of Article 111 of the Ukrainian Criminal Code). For the latter offence, he and Malstlev himself, who was on the run, face a life sentence.

The intelligence investigation revealed that Oleg Maltsev had set up a spy organisation that worked for the Russian enemy. It was a full-fledged sabotage unit consisting of 23 people, including an assault group, a sniper, a reconnaissance group, an operational support group and even a communications officer.

This story is ironic for two reasons. The first reason is that the “anti-cult movement” have been accusing them of being close to Russia by cult apologists for years. So being caught by the Ukrainian security services in the vicinity of a traitor working for the Russian enemy is just as embarrassing as a conservative being caught red-handed with a tranny. This guy will of course be able to say: “I did not know that",” and if he is not particularly bright, there is also a risk that it is true.

The second element that makes me smile is that the director of CESNUR, who likes to describe me as “sometimes funny but not brilliant” - as is common among academics - said that CESNUR's magazine, Bitter Winter, would be able to gather much more information about the misdeeds of the Chinese Communist Party than the CIA. However, it had failed to realise that the group they were exchanging mutual appreciation, besides being (it seems) a criminal syndicate, was also working for Russia. They also were betrayed. Funny, but not brilliant.

Figure 79 - Oleg Maltslev and Massimo Introvigne at CESNUR in Turin, 2016

If you want a little amusement, you can read Willy Fautré's (HRWF) heartfelt defence of Maltslev, who is allegedly the victim of a conspiracy. Among the hilarious things expressed in his article, Fautré cites as the most likely of the hypotheses about the architects of the plot against poor Maltslev the martial arts schools, which would have been very concerned about the new form of fighting invented by the Ukrainian "scientist". No kidding. It is written here: Ukraine, Suspicion of Fabrication of a Criminal Case. The less authoritative newspaper publishing this piece of journalism is an old acquaintance, **The European Times**, the publication linked to Scientology (see Fascists, spies and gurus. 1. Prologue).

Back to China. One of the most horrific accusations levelled at the Chinese Communist Party is that it harvests organs from living people (or kills them to harvest their vital organs), especially from "prisoners of conscience" such as followers of Falun Gong and the Church of Almighty God. According to a 2017

Washington Post report, investigations and reports have refuted the claim that China is currently secretly performing 60,000 to 100,000 organ transplants per year. Data compiled by US-based Quintiles IMS showed that China's demand for immunosuppressant drugs, which are needed to prevent patients' bodies from rejecting transplanted organs, was roughly equal to the number of transplants China said it was performing. On 14 November 2018, Mark Field of the **UK Foreign Office** responded to a specific question in a debate on the issue in the House of Commons in London: "We disagree with claims of systematic organ harvesting from political prisoners of conscience, assessing that the evidence they present does not substantiate that claim." A similar position was taken by Australia. However, a London-based independent tribunal called the **China Tribunal - Independent Tribunal into Forced Organ Harvesting from Prisoners of Conscience in China** has confirmed the veracity of organ harvesting. This body was founded by the **International Coalition to End Transplant Abuse in China (ETAC)**. However, if you look at ETAC's website, you will find that **many members of its "management" have close ties to the Epoch Times, the Falun Gong newspaper!** If you go through the list of ETAC management, these Falun Gong connections appear in almost all of them. ETAC is clearly a Falun Gong front organisation. Of course, this does not mean that the findings and conclusions of this tribunal are necessarily false, but its vaunted independence does. The problem is that it is the judgement of this tribunal that Bitter Winter refers to in his articles on this subject. Let us remember that Bitter Winter is the main source of information on China for the US State Department.

Meanwhile, the influence of Bitter Winter also seems to be having an effect in Italy. This is evidenced by the fact that, as Introvigne himself writes on the website of HRWF, the Belgian organisation chaired by Willy Fautrè, more and more followers of the Church of Almighty God (CAG) are finding asylum in

Italy precisely because of the magazine. Interestingly, Italy is the main refugee country for the Chinese cult. Introvigne writes:

On June 14, in an exemplary decision judging a CAG asylum seeker, represented by specialized lawyers Amalia Astory and Laura Bondi, as deserving "the higher level of protection" in Italy, the Tribunal of Rome answered the question by mentioning as "reliable sources" "Bitter Winter," reports by the U.S. and other governments that quote "Bitter Winter," and a statement by the late sociologist PierLuigi Zoccatelli, who was deputy director of CESNUR, "Bitter Winter"'s parent organization.

Reference is made to the case of a woman who was refused asylum at first instance in 2018. The author speculates that the court was influenced by Chinese propaganda. That may be, but the real objection was that it was not credible that in a closed, non-democratic, high-tech surveillance country, an influx of believers from a church persecuted by the government into Italy, all of whom with their proper passports, was possible. It was Bitter Winter's men who made it clear to the court that corruption of officials is extremely widespread in China and therefore it is not very difficult even for members of the Church of Almighty God to obtain a passport to leave the country. On what basis did they prove this? Introvigne says:

Quoting Italian government sources, which in turn refer to "Bitter Winter," "a study by sociologist Pier Luigi Zoccatelli," and the U.S. State Department reports on religious liberty (which also quoted "Bitter Winter") [...]

Oh, okay then...

Bitter Winter not only informs the West about China's persecution of spiritual minorities, but also campaigns vigorously against the "**anti-cult narrative**" promoted by organisations it assumes are linked to the governments of France, Russia and China. Another conspiracy the editors are

keen to address is the artificial origin of the coronavirus, which allegedly escaped from a Chinese laboratory.

It may be a coincidence, but a recent study conducted by the University of Urbino has shown that **most of the nodes of the disinformation network about the Covid 19 pandemic in Italy lead directly to the website of the Church of Almighty God.**

Certainly, some doubts about the reliability of Bitter Winter, when the Ministry of Foreign Affairs does not have it, have instead been expressed by sources that have no connection with the Chinese government, which could have an advantage in discrediting the magazine. For example, from a Korean Protestant publication (see screenshot below) and from the website BZBriefs, which is affiliated with China Source, a non-profit Christian "ministry" based in the U.S. that seeks to reduce the CCP's pressure on Christian churches. These critics speculate about a connection between Bitter Winter and the Church of Almighty God. It must be said that China Source later rectified its claim by publishing that it understood that Bitter Winter is not connected to the Church of Almighty God in private discussions with Bitter Winter .

However, no one dares to speculate with whom this church is in turn connected.

전능신교와 비터윈터(Bitter Winter)... 가짜뉴스 유포로 수십 차례 신고당해
기사승인 2021.05.08 14:38:16
가- 가+
종교·정치적 목적위해 의도적으로 거짓정보 유포
BITTER WINTER
Bitter Winter
FAKE NEWS
▲ 가짜뉴스 유포— '마시모 인트로빈'(MASSIMO INTROVIGNE)의 '비터 윈터'(Bitter Winter)

Figure 80 - An articles on the korean site "Church Eresy" debunking Bitter Winter.

We only know that the persecutions of the CCP, real and alleged, are absolutely useful in demonstrating the godlessness of the Chiana government.
There is one small problem, however: what is going on in China is hard to kno w. But
that's not a problem for Bitter Winter. The magazine is a useful megaphone of persecution. Ifit did not exist, the American services would have had to invent it.

Video 3 - Massimo Introvigne on TV 2000 (Italy) in October 2023. The journalist hints at his relationship with the secret services

VIII - The Double Truth

The strange case of the 'Group of Thebes"

Paris, June 3 1990: In a hall of the Grand Orient de France (GOF), the most important Masonic observance beyond the Alps, the official founding of an occult esoteric group took place. It was called the **Group of Thebes**, but will only become known three years later thanks to a press release revealing its name and composition. The latter is very interesting because it involved a peculiar acolyte. The lynchpin of the group was **Rémi Boyer**, a representative of the magical Order of the Rosicrucians (AMORC). Boyer had already founded 'Arc-en-ciel', an association of occult and New Age groups (including Sri Chinmoy, the Grande Loge indépendante des rites unis, the Institut pour une synthèse planètaire, the Ordre Chevaleresque de la Rose-Croix, the Brahma Kumaris Spiritual University). The Group of Thebes was thus Boyer's second creation, dedicated to a smaller and presumably higher group of 'initiates'. It is therefore noteworthy that among the latter was the very Catholic **Massimo Introvigne**, a prominent figure of **Alleanza Cattolica** and founder and director of the **Centro Studi Nuove Religioni (CESNUR)** for two years. The lawyer, who was caught in this embarrassing situation by a French magazine, will claim to have been admitted as a scholar. A claim that might convince those who are not familiar with the workings of an esoteric society. Indeed, initiatory orders proceeds for hierarchical levels of knowledge sanctioned by special rites of passage. It is therefore unlikely that an initiatory group would accept an uninitiated scholar among its high-ranking esotericists. Among other things, the group was even secret from the Freemasons of the Grand Lodge, and also from the "Alexandria Group", which acted as a nursery to attract new

members to the more occult circle. Introvigne, who had only been involved with spiritual movements for two years, would have entered this circle directly, and the high initiates, who did not break secrecy even with "brothers" of the high degrees, would have welcomed him to be studied by a profane. In response to the criticism levelled at him by the traditionalist magazine 'Sodalitium', our man finally let it be known that he was **one of the founders of the Group of Thebes**. However, it is not untrue that the Thebes Group was a study group. The various esoteric realities there should have been compared in order to define which groups really fulfil the criteria of the Tradition.

GROUPE DE THEBES

LISTE DES MEMBRES FONDATEURS:

ROBERT AMADOU
CHRISTIAN BOUCHET
REMI BOYER
SERGE CAILLET
JEAN-MARIE D'ANSEMBOURG
JEAN-PIERRE GIUDICELLI
DE CRESSAC BACHELERIE
MASSIMO INTR[redacted]I
TRIANTAPHYLLOS KOTZAMANIS
MICHEL-LACROIX
GEORGE MAGNE DE CRESSAC
MICHEL MONKREAU
LAURENT NAULT
RENE NAULT
JEAN-PASCAL RUGGIU
MARIA-CHRISTIANA SCHWARZWELLER
NICOLAS NICOLAEVITCH IOVETZ-
TKRESHCHENKO

Figure 81 - The list of founders of the Thebes Group. Strangely Introvigne's surname is partially concealed

This of course requires advanced knowledge, in the initiatory sense, from all members.

Introvigne was not the only Italian; there were others. One of them was a no less anomalous presence. It was **Paolo Fogagnolo**, a former member of the '**Brigate Rosse**' (Red Brigades), a communist terroristic organisation, to whom the "Madonna", or rather the Sefira, the equivalent of the Virgin in the esoteric tradition, had appeared. He had therefore turned to esotericism and founded the group 'Prometheus', which was dedicated to the Egyptian mysteries. The group was recognised by various magical orders, including the **Ordo Templi Orientis**). This is the hermetic order made famous by **Aleister Crowley**, who called himself "the Beast 666" and is regarded as the founder of modern occultism and a source of inspiration for Satanism. Crowley had sympathies for the Nazis.

In addition to the traditionalist Catholic and the former terrorist who saw the Mother of God, there were some interesting personalities. One of the pillars of the group of Thebes was **Jean-Pierre Giudicelli**. He is a Corsican independentist, right-wing extremist and former member of the neo-fascist groups **Ordre Nouveau** (inspired by the Italian group **Ordine Nuovo**, responsible for the massacres in Italy) and **Troisieme Voie** (disbanded by the Council of Ministers). The latter, former head of the French section of the Order of Myriam, an organisation dedicated to sexual magic, later became bishop of the Church of the **New Alliance**. Other members were **Jean-Marie Vergerio** of the **Order of the Templars of Circe**, **Robert Amadou**, parapsychologist and occultist, Rosicrucian, **Triantaphyllos Kotzamanis**, Freemason, Bishop of the Gnostic Apostolic Church and Rosicrucian, **Gérard Kloppel**, Freemason and Martinist, **Jean-Pascal Ruggiu**, Grand Hierophant of the **Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn** (a magical order also linked to Aleister Crowley), **Georges Magne de Cressac** and **Jean-Marie D'Asembourg**, well-known right-wing extremists.

So far, the most presentable members have been listed. According to some French outlets, one of the members was the historian Robert Faurisson, the most famous Holocaust denier. However, Massimo Introvigne scornfully and firmly denies this claim, stating that he never saw him at the group's meetings (and adds that if Faurisson had been there, he would have left). Introvigne is keen to express his opposition to holocaust denialism. The Italian does not show the same contempt for a member whose presence is instead certain: Christian Bouchet. The latter is a Nazi-Maoist (or, as they say in France, a Mao-Maurrassien). He was active in several neo-fascist groups and joined the Groupement de Recherche et d'Études pour la Civilisation Européenne (GRECE) in the early 1980s. GRECE is an anti-Christian and neo-pagan group in favour of identity and sovereignty. An expert on the English magician **Aleister Crowley**, Bouchet was a member of the **Ordo Templi Orientis (OTO)**. He is also a member of the white supremacist cult **World Church of the Creator,** also known as the Creativity Movement. He is also the editor of several magazines. These include 'Lutte du Peuple', which can be categorised as 'neo-Nazi'. Remy Boyer replied to a journalist who asked him how he could include a character like Bouchet in the group

when adventurers, the great travellers, set off to tackle the Himalayas, they know that above 4000 metres, everyone they meet is inevitably their friend. No matter what they were in the valley.

Bouchet was a speaker at the international CESNUR conference in Santa Barbara in 1991 and four times in France in 1992. CESNUR and Bouchet were clearly above 4000 metres.

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Figure 82 - Jean-Pierre Giudicelli, Christian Bouchet and Robert Faurisson

Surprisingly, 'Secrets et sociétés', a small confidential newsletter specialising in the life of cults, reported in great detail on a disagreement between Bouchet and Ruggiu (the two had clashed because Bouchet had published part of the Golden Dawn ritual in his magazine 'Thelema'). Rémi Boyer picked up the phone and called the editor-in-chief of Secrets et sociétés, **Arnaud d'Apremont**. It is not known what the two talked about or how the newsletter learnt of the internal disagreements within the group, but the two became friends. Behind d'Apremont, however, was **Arnaud Dupont**, a militant right-wing extremist, as well as the director of the newsletter, **Philippe-André Duquesne**. The aim of the two men was to build bridges between right-wing extremist networks and the small world of esoteric groups and secret societies. The project stemmed from Duquesne and Apremont's shared experience in the ranks of **GRECE**, the same neo-pagan group as Bouchet. The extreme right has indeed appropriated the pagan tradition to make it the basis of a new fascist thought. The idea is to destroy the concept of equality associated with the Judeo-Christian tradition. The plan of the two editors of the newsletter to infiltrate the group to make it a node of the fascist network was certainly successful since D'apremont revealed to the journalist Serge Faubert that he and **Massimo Introvigne** were planning to create an esoteric magazine together.

Agostino Sanfratello, one of the founders of **Alleanza Cattolica** (see the Fascists, spies and gurus. 4. The black network), explains perfectly how it is possible for seemingly opposing souls such as Catholic traditionalism and neo-paganism to coexist. We remember that he is close to the neo-fascist **Franco Freda**. The latter, a self-proclaimed 'Nazi-Maoist', was convicted for the explosives attacks of 25 April 1969 and those on trains the following summer, which were carried out as part of the so-called **strategy of tension**. He was

later convicted of subversive association for founding the **Gruppo di Ar**. Freda is also the editor of 'Edizioni Ar'. In the manifesto of the Ar Group he writes:

We are for an Aristocracy that is a radical rejection of the egalitarian model [...] We are for a traditional concept of existence in which the exaggerated and abnormal suggestions of society and the economy give way to the heroic values of the spirit understood as Honour, Hierarchy and Loyalty'.

In 1983, to mark the 20th anniversary of the publishing house, Freda published 'Risguardo IV', a special edition of his journal containing numerous contributions, including one by Sanfratello. In this text, the ultra-Catholic, founder of Alleanza Cattolica and one of the main protagonists of the **Confraternity of St Pius X**, turned against the comrades rebelling against the neo-pagan current of the New Right by invoking the "plurality of traditions' and the 'convergence in the common struggle'.

Marco Pasi commented on Introvigne's speech at a conference on the "roots and development of contemporary paganism" in Lyon in the right-wing magazine "Orion" with these words:

Thus, in his first speech, Introvigne explicitly said that accepting an invitation to a conference on neo-paganism, where a confrontation with 'neo-pagans' was planned, was 'not only a pleasure but also a duty', at a time when the report of the commission of enquiry [of the French parliament] described neo-paganism as socially dangerous because it was widespread in racist and anti-Semitic far-right circles."

(in 'Esoterismo e nuova religiosità', in *Orion*, Milan, March-April 1996, p. 51 ff.)

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Figures 83 and 84 - Agostino Sanfratello and Franco Freda

Tradition, perennialism and Far Right

We have said that in the group of Thebes different esoteric realities should have been compared in order to define which groups really fulfil the criteria of Tradition. It is therefore necessary to briefly explain the relationship between traditionalism, esotericism and right-wing political thought, i.e. the constituent elements of the group just analysed.

Traditionalism assumes the existence of a perennial wisdom or philosophy, of original and universal truths that are the source of and shared by all major world religions. According to the representatives of traditionalism, all major world religions are based on common original and universal metaphysical truths. The perspective of their authors is often referred to as "**philosophia perennis**" (perennial philosophy). There would then exist a perennial wisdom (sophia perennis) and a perennial religion (religio perennis).

According to the traditionalists, this truth has been lost in the modern world d ue to the rise of novel secular philosophies dating back to the Italian Renaissance and led to the
to the Enlightenment, and modernity itself is seen as an abnormality. The breakdown of natural hierarchies, egalitarianism and disregard for the sacred are part of this abnormality. This constitutes reactionary thinking and gives rise to a first link between the political right and traditionalism. In addition to right-wing culture, the traditionalists' perennialism is closely linked to **esotericism**. Indeed, esotericism refers to the supposed ability to access the intimate and unified core of a truth that transcends external appearances. Every religion would have an esoteric component from which it emerges.

By transitive relation, right-wing culture is linked to esotericism.

The access to truth permitted by esoteric research involves an initiation and a step-by-step discovery. Exoteric (external) and esoteric (internal) characters can coexist in the same doctrine: instead of excluding each other, they can complement each other. The same doctrine may have an esoteric and an exoteric component; or the same teaching may be given an exoteric interpretation, open to all, and a deeper esoteric one, the preserve of the initiated only. The most famous example of an esoteric order in the West is **Freemasonry**.

The best known exponent of traditionalism was the French **René Guénon,** but for the purposes of our discourse the Italian **Julius Evola** is more important**.** He was influenced by Guénon but from whom he departed on many points. In fact, he was the one who exerted the greatest influence on the far right-wing movements in France and Italy, especially in the "years of lead". The terrorists of **Ordine Nuovo** were devoted to pagan-type rituals with animal sacrifices. Some fringe slipped into magic and occultism (You can read Stefania Limiti, Potere Occulto. Dal fascismo alle stragi di mafia la lunga storia criminale italiana, Milan, 2022).

After Evola, Traditionalism provided the ideological cement for the alliance of anti-democratic forces, also in post-Soviet Russia. So, **Steve Bannon**, former Donald Trump adviser and **Aleksandr Dugin**, informal adviser to Vladimir Putin, can both be included in the same club, that of Evola's admirers, and have therefore interacted with each other on the basis of their common interests.

CESNUR in action

The Group of Thebes is undoubtedly very heterogeneous. Despite its obvious exoteric diversity (there is the Catholic, the neo-pagan, the sovereignist, the terrorist, the red-brown, etc.), the members of the Group of Thebes are nevertheless united, because they are representatives of reaction and traditionalism. In practise, it is a group of extreme right-wing esotericists.

Indeed, the composition of the Group appears to be similar to that of the French branch of **CESNUR,** now extinct. The board of the Introvigne study centre included **Antoine Faivre**, right-wing Freemason, occultist, martinist and editor-in-chief of the esoteric magazine "Cahiers Villard de Honnecourt", **Olivier-Louis Séguy**, Freemason and right-wing extremist with links to the **Front National**, **Roland Edighoffer**, Freemason and Rosicrucian, and **Jean-Francois Mayer**, a militant right-wing extremist in Lyon, former sales manager of the denialist newspaper 'Défense de l'Occident', member of the neo-fascist movement **Nouvel Ordre Social**, a contributor to the esoteric magazine 'Politica Hermetica' and '**Panorama des idees actuelles**', a magazine of the neo-pagan group **GRECE**, as well as an agent of the Swiss military secret service. **Régis Ladous**, a historian with occult interests, was also a member of CESNUR's board of directors. The latter was at the centre of a scandal involving the University of Lyon when student Jean Plantin received an excellent grade from Ladous in 1990 for a thesis denying the Holocaust.

In 1992, the conference 'Magical Challenges' took place in Lyon, organised jointly by the University of Lyon II and CESNUR. Regis Ladous did not speak as a representative of CESNUR, but as a professor at the University of Lyon III. Other speakers included the indefatigable Massimo Introvigne, Bruno Geras, Rector of the University of Lyon III, and other emblematic figures of CESNUR.

Among them was **Christian Bouchet**, the neo-Nazi who is also a member of the Thebes group.

In 2001, Serge Garde wrote in 'L'Humanité':

Massimo Introvigne's CESNUR acts as a bridge between the sects and the far right, starting from their university bases. In Lyon, but also in Paris. The president of CESNUR-France, Antoine Faivre, is a professor at the École pratique des hautes études en sciences religieux at the Sorbonne. This small world knows each other, works together, publishes and helps each other. This is how the activist Christian Bouchet became a doctor of ethnology in 1994, after defending his dissertation with Robert Amadou, professor at Paris 7, chronicler of '"Original", an esoteric series in which Massimo Introvigne and Christian Bouchet are rampaging. Régis Ladous is published by Jean-François Mayer, among others.

'L'originel' is the magazine of Charles Antoni, who claims to specialise in 'traditional sciences' but is in fact an occultist. It was around this magazine that the group was reformed in practise. In short, CESNUR , some esoteric groups and the Group of Thebes overlap. The structures have different functions, but the characters are often the same.

To better understand the role of CESNUR, let us begin with the testimony of criminologist Jean-Marie Abgrall before the Belgian parliamentary committee of enquiry into cults (1997):

A few years ago, the cults joined together in **FIREPHIM**, the International Federation of Minority Religions and Philosophies, **a kind of mutual assistance treaty between the cults** in the event that one of them is incriminated or threatened. Just as FIREPHIM (NDR: association created in 1992 on the initiative of Scientology, the Unification Church and the Raelian Movement to 'defend new religious movements') was quickly exposed, the cults have created a parallel structure, the **CESNUR**, the Centre for the Study of New Religions, whose director, Massimo Introvigne, is a professor at the Pontifical Athenaeum Regina Apostolorum, which belongs to the Vatican. This Athenaeum was founded by the **Legionaries of Christ**, a movement that is close to the European far right, or more precisely to a fundamentalist Catholic extreme right. At this moment, all European cults are trying to obtain a kind of moral, public and political guarantee. Introvigne himself is also responsible for a structure called **Alleanza Cattolica**, the Roman equivalent of **TFP Tradition-Family-Property**, a far-right cult.

(Bold mine)

Abgrall's statement is imprecise in its temporal definition, since CESNUR was founded in 1988 and FIREPHIM in 1992, so that the Italian organisation cannot be considered as the answer at the end of the French one, but the description of their functions is valid.

The 1999 report of the French commission of enquiry on sects states:

The presence of dominant characteristics in different organisations raises the problem of the existence of a **"cross-sectoral" structure** that would be responsible for ensuring the defence and coordinating the different movements. Several examples of co-operation between cults have been brought to the Commission's attention. Several organisations play an open

role in the coordination of the cults. The Centre for Studies on New Religions (CESNUR) - under the direction of Mr Massimo Introvigne - has been a platform for the defence of sectarianism for several years... In particular, CESNUR has launched a campaign to denigrate the work of the former [parliamentary] commission of enquiry.

Traditionalist Catholics defending cults...no stranger than Catholics who ally t hemselves with neo-pagans...

According to **Stephen Kent** of the University of Alberta, CESNUR is "the highes t-
profile lobbying group for controversial religions" and its director is said to be "[a] fierce critic of any rational attempt to identify or restrict so-called 'cults,' who has spoken out against what he sees as intolerance towards ' minority religions,' particularly in Belgium, France and Germany.

CESNUR at the scene of the crime

In October 1994, 48 followers of the **Order of the Solar Temple** were found dead in the villages of Cheiry and Salvan in Switzerland. When the bodies were discovered, a self-appointed 'religious affairs adviser from the Central Defence Office' appeared at the scene of the crime and collaborated with the investigators by questioning the witnesses alone, ignoring all procedural rules.

He was **Jean-François Mayer**, a former far-right activist in Lyon and a contributor to the magazine Panorama des idees actuelles, a publication of the **GRECE**, the right-wing, neo-pagan think tank we have already met. By 1976, however, he had converted to orthodox Christianity. The most interesting thing, however, is that this person was a leading member of **CESNUR**, the

Centre for the Study of ‘New Religious Movements', which grew out of an Alleanza Cattolica offshoot. In a BBC documentary on the Solar Temple suicides case, Mayer is portrayed as a representative of Swiss military intelligence.

Figure 85 - Jean-Francois Mayer in the BBC documentary "The Order of The Solar Temple"

After the discovery of the bodies of 16 other followers of the Solar Temple in December 1995 in Vercors, France, Jean-François Mayer was one of the 300 privileged people who received a cult file containing the posthumous writings of the sacrificed.

In her book ‘Ordre du Temple Solaire, en quête de vérité’, Rosemarie Jaton reports on the content of an interview with J.F. Mayer, in which he admits to having been in contact with Luc Jouret, one of the two leaders of the Order of the Solar Temple. Luc Jouret was a former Belgian far-right military officer

who was associated with Gladio, a branch of the secret anti-communist NATO organisation known as Stay Behind.

The supposed 'mass suicides' of the Solar Temple still remain shrouded in mystery. Certainly, the facts recounted suggest **a connection between intelligence, the far right and cults.**

Double truth and noble lie

It is well known that Alleanza Cattolica has followed the doctrine of the **Tradition, Family and Property** from the very beginning (see Fascists, spies and gurus. 4. The black network). According to the historian **Orlando Fedeli**, who has been a member for thirty years, Tradition, Family and Property would be a millenarian and gnostic cult. There would be an external doctrine and a secret teaching reserved for the highest levels of knowledge.

De Oliveira's 'esoteric' teachings, which can also be read in the magazine 'Dr Plinio', directed by Monsignor João Scognamiglio Clá Dias, focused on the '**metaphysical superiority' of the nobility**, especially the South American landed gentry. One can see how this faithfully traces both the Platonic hierarchy of human beings and the Gnostic idea that salvation is reserved solely for the 'spiritual' (and condemnation partly for the 'psychic' and entirely for the 'ilical'). The TFP's anti-egalitarianism engenders in its activists a contempt for class, a taste for luxury and idleness.

In the Joyeux report on the **TFP school in Saint Benoit**, France, we read that **hardness of heart and undisguised hatred of ordinary people characterise the**

daily behaviour of the majority of TFP activists. Everything that has to do with luxury, glamour and idleness is seen as counter-revolutionary and triggers a sense of pride that stems from the feeling of belonging to a destined elite. Since the revolutionary mentality is characterised by a virulent glorification of pauperism, the TFP acts by systematically claiming the opposite.

A TFP activist once said to a young Frenchman visiting Brazil: 'It's good to get up late in the morning because it goes against the revolutionary spirit that drives activism'. Since most TFP activists do not have to keep a schedule and do not have a job, they can lead a sweet life (p. 46 of the report).

To understand De Oliveira's elitism, it is enough to know that he never supported 'integrism', the Brazilian version of fascism, because he considered it too 'interclassist' and 'socialist' and not open to the demands of the metaphysical superiority of the landed aristocracy.

The result of this thinking is authoritarian-conservative in politics, pro-free market in economics and gnostic-millenaristic in the spiritual realm.

Its Italian expression **Alleanza Cattolica** was originally propagated by the Veronese magazine 'Carattere'. The Catholicism of 'Carattere' had its points of reference in Papini, Attilio Mordini, Domenico Giuliotti and Silvano Panunzio; it was a Catholicism that pursued the 'chivalrous path of an **aristocratic and** Ghibelline **Christianity**'. In short, it was well prepared to embrace the vision of Dr Plinio. Not only that, it pursued a 'traditionalism' that we might call '**Christian esotericism**" (see here), i.e. not even in opposition to those who seek "tradition" in the myth of the heights of the spirit that preceded the Fall, i.e. the decadent era, the "Kali Yuga" described by **Julius Evola**, who is indeed

among those who are appreciated by Alleanza Cattolica. The fact that Evola was pagan and anti-Christian did not seem to bother the founder of Alleanza Cattolica, Giovanni Cantoni, as he praised him as one of "the "prophets of the crisis of the modern world"; immediately afterwards he added, among other things: "In our opinion, only one person has said what needed to be said and could be said: René Guénon". Evola and Guenon were both esotericists and expressions of a traditionalism that is a "revolt against the modern world" and an anti-egalitarian differentialism. The convergence in the above-mentioned common struggle.

It has been seen that **Tradition, Family and Property** embraced American neoconservatism in the 1980s (see Fascists, spies and gurus. 4. The black network). At the suggestion of Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira, **Paul Weyrich** founded the **International Policy Forum (IPF)**, an alliance of conservative associations that laid the foundations for the emergence of a transnational New Right. Paul Weyrich also founded the Heritage Foundation, the Free Congress Foundation, which he chaired, and the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC). We know that these organisations, along with dozens of other 'libertarian' organisations that see religious freedom and economic freedom as inseparable - paradigmatically, the **Acton Institute** calls itself "for the Study of Religion and Liberty" - form an important operational arm of the US soft power. The tactic is that of 'entryism', i.e. **the colonisation of the media, the academy, and the parties, in order to steer the masses in a counter-revolutionary direction**. Alleanza Cattolica (and CESNUR) is participating in this strategy.

Emanuele Del Medico writes:

The goals set by this 'counter-revolutionary apostolate' relate above all to the **struggle against secularism**, the rewriting of historical memory and the

control of the ideological production of the Italian right through the **creation of a narrow intellectual elite** from which the future ruling class would emerge. The 'establishment of the kingship of Christ also over human societies' would be expressed in the **restoration of traditional hierarchies within the framework of a society of order in which religion would once again assume a predominant role in social control and the legitimisation of political and economic power**. The access of representatives of AC to the upper echelons of Berlusconi's coalition does not appear to be a novelty: the politicians Riccardo Pedrizzi, Alfredo Mantovano and Michele Vietti are part of it. The underlying project is not so much to uphold the banner of Catholic traditionalism, but to establish a hyper-conservative neoliberal right wing on the model of that in the United States.

(Bold mine)

As a critic "from the right" of the TFP's epigones, Luigi Copertino, writes, "The thought and above all the financial resources of American neoconservatism, which reach as far as Europe, have succeeded where flowery theological and philosophical treatises have failed: namely, the feat of converting to Americanism, with extreme and suspicious rapidity, large sections of Catholic traditionalism that until yesterday resisted anything that seemed modern and liberal and therefore American," underestimating that the Catholic neoconservative who espouses the reasons for Euro-American cultural unity "accepts to move ideally in a Protestant rather than a Catholic context." In truth, this acceptance of moving in a Protestant context had already manifested itself in the TFP in the 1970s, when one of the organisation's top figures, José Lùcio de Araùjo Correa, suggested to a fierce anti-Catholic, the Reverend **Carl McIntire**, that they work together to "fight progressive Christianity, secular modernisation and communism" (Cowan, 2001, p. 154). This deep aversion to progressive drift enabled McIntire to overcome his deep aversion to Catholicism, and TFP to overcome McIntire's anti-Catholicism.

Overcoming theological and ideological differences in pursuit of a common goal is thus the hallmark of the counter-revolutionary network and will indeed be the hallmark of the work of Introvigne and CESNUR, an organisation born from a rib of an ultra-Catholic group and ready to protect non-Catholic cults from the criticism of those who carry the values of modernity.

The same conversion from anti-Americanism to Atlanticism that we have seen in the TFP had taken place in European neo-fascism through the **OAS** and the **Aginter presse** (see Fascists, spies and gurus. 3. The black network).

It is therefore interesting to look at the roots of the idea that Alleanza Cattolica and the board of CESNUR have embraced so passionately, namely the **neoconservative movement** of America. **Leo Strauss** is considered, rightly or wrongly, to be their inspiration. Strauss believed that all great writers wrote in a form distorted for the common people, an 'exoteric' form, and that the clues to the 'esoteric' truth had to be found between the lines. This truth was reserved for those who could bear it, such as the disciples chosen by the Master, whom he called "hoplites". This truth consisted of the nihilistic realisation that the only truth is nothingness and that all moral principles are empty and meaningless. The 'exoteric', external message, on the other hand, consisted precisely in these 'natural moral values'. The authentic philosopher must despise the beliefs of the people, but in public he must pretend to believe in the myths and illusions concocted for the use of the masses, he must conceal this contempt and in reality be the spokesman of moral values suitable for the masses: religion, democracy, justice.

Once again, lessons reserved for the elect, elitism, counter-revolution.

Strauss, who, like de Oliveira, adopts an anti-egalitarian and aristocratic perspective, enters into polemics with modernity and democratic concepts by

explicitly resorting to the "**noble lie**" and affirming the need to **use religion as a rhetorical device to manipulate and control the masses**. It is the doctrine of "**double truth**", the first legitimisation of which comes from a thinker very dear to certain elitists, **Plato.** In his 'ideal city', the aristocracy of spirit and thought is legitimised to use deception for moral, educational and political purposes:

[...] God, when he created you, mixed gold into the generation of those among you who can exercise power, so that they are the most valuable; into that of the guards silver; iron and bronze into that of the farmers and craftsmen.[...] the city will perish when it is protected by a defender of iron or bronze.

As it turns out, the members of TFP feel like they are made of gold, probably their epigones too. The TFP, its Italian sister organisation and the study centre derived from them, in the wake of the overlapping elitist thinking of Correa de Oliveira and Strauss, seem to have embraced the duplicity that every Platonic builder of 'caretaker governments' recommends.

So when we highlight the duplicity of CESNUR, since it is the front office of a traditionalist Catholic organisation and at the same time a centre that produces studies for the benefit of the cults furthest removed from Catholicism, we are not talking about logical paradoxes or personality splits, not even the banal lie of mercenaries hired by the cults, but about double truth and noble lies.

It is not surprising that it is considered morally acceptable to resort to lying 'ad usum populi', to profess the values of a democratic and liberal society that one inwardly despises. The fact that these values are despised by the CESNUR leadership is clear from the much-cited genealogy of the study centre. That it

is a 'legitimate' imposture to pose as defenders of religious freedom becomes clear when one considers the Platonism inherent in this genealogy.

When a law against mental manipulation was passed in France in 2001, Introvigne wrote a "manifesto" with advice on how to defend oneself against it. Point 1 was entitled "Trying to understand the law in the French context" and made it clear that the defence of religious freedom that CESNUR proposes is still perfectly embedded in the counter-revolutionary project. Indeed, the author wrote that a good starting point for understanding the French law is to realise that "the French are truly convinced that the eradication of religious belief is desirable and possible". It is this theoretical conspiracy that CESNUR is responding to. Yes, the enemy is still Robespierre.

Point 2 is entitled '**Supporting internal and European litigation**'. In other words: Intervention in the media, in the courts and even in supranational bodies such as the OSCE and the UN to protect the rights of 'new religious movements' from persecution by a phantom 'anti-cult movement'. In practise, this is an action of institutional lobbying and cultural influence.

This is precisely the mission of the international network of associations for the defence of 'religious freedom", made up of non-governmental organisations linked to **Scientology** and other cults, but also American neo-conservative foundations, very reminiscent of the **Birch Society**, which acted as a link for the Aginter presse, including that of the aforementioned **Atlas Network** or the Rutherford Institute, with which CESNUR has a historical acquaintance. The 'cult apologists' form a network of interest groups that are active in international bodies such as the OSCE and the Council of Europe. These organisations include **Human Rights Without Frontiers - HRWF**, the **European Federation for Freedom of Belief - FOB** (which we met in the prologue to this dossier) and **Coordination des associations et des particuliers**

pour la liberté de conscience - CAP LC. The mutual contacts between these organisations, CESNUR, Scientology, the American 'libertarian' foundations and sectors of neocon politics are so close that the distance between one node of the network and another is hardly greater than two intermediate nodes. In fact, there is often complete overlap.

CESNUR seems to play the same role in this network that the Aginter Presse played in the subversive work, namely that of a control room.

In point 4 of the manifesto ('Don't feed the wolves') Introvigne writes:

[...] even the less pleasant movements, accused of pseudo-crimes such as 'brainwashing' or 'cult', should be vigorously defended.
No matter how much we dislike them, [...]

The benevolence even towards abusive cults therefore seems somewhat hypocritical and the call for tolerance and ecumenism seem to be actions that only acquire a morally positive connotation when they follow the justifying logic of the 'double effect' that was of Ousset and the OAS militants. In short, if it serves to combat subversion and secularism (and enforce the global hegemony of conservative America), anything goes. St Thomas takes care of that. With the help of Uncle Sam.